



## Salts shot down by friendly fire

Merstham 3-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Mid-season Friendly. Saturday 14th October 2023.

With a spare Saturday on the schedule it made total sense to arrange a friendly against another team in a similar situation; that of Step Four Merstham, who edged us out by three goals to one in a match played on the artificial surface at Carshalton Athletic.

This match was arranged on Tuesday, yet our club only saw fit to announce it on Saturday morning, by which time most Epsom people had probably already decided to visit another match. It is a real concern that our club says it wants a new ground and says it wants supporters, yet wants to restrict all information to a small Committee, leaving everyone else in the dark. Fortunately Merstham did advertise the match and I counted 47 present at the impressive Colston Avenue ground.

We have played here on 35 previous occasions, yet if you exclude an Isthmian League Youth Cup Final win over Bromley in 1991, we hadn't won here since 1953 and hadn't even scored since we lost 2-1 here back in 1986, so it was nice for us to hit the net in the final minutes, even if Tino Carpene's penalty ended up as just a consolation goal. For what it's worth though, I thought we deserved a little more from this match, particularly in the second half after we had made nine changes at the break.

We started with the same line up we had used in our recent win over Colliers Wood United, except for the addition of Nick Inwugwu for the injured Zach Powell and the return of Ash Snadden ahead of Tijani Eshilokun, but the first half was almost exclusively in favour of our opponents with Harvey Keogh having to make a couple of good low saves to keep them out in the opening twenty minutes. They led with a well worked goal, starting with a great piece of skill in midfield that left our boys behind and a lay off for a shot that Keogh was able to block, although Lorenzo Lewis was there first to tuck away the loose ball from close range in the 34th minute.

We had our best chance in the final seconds of the half when Ade Batula cut in from the right, but his low left-footed strike was well kept out by the leg of the Merstham keeper.

However, the second half appeared much better from an Epsom point of view as we started to make progress. Eshilokun joined the fray and scuffed an early shot at goal from a good position, while another substitute Sirak Negassi also saw his shot saved. In response Merstham also had a low shot well blocked by Toby Colwell who was in goal for the second half, but they then extended their lead with a superb strike into the roof of the net from the edge of the penalty area in the 62nd minute.

Negassi was linking well with George Owusu on the left and the latter won a corner, although the delivery was over everyone. Then on the break a low ball in from the left was tapped in from close range at the far post to make the score 3-0 in the 73rd minute. This was a little harsh as we had been putting some pressure on and Merstham had conceded a couple of fouls that most definitely would have earned yellow cards in a competitive fixture. A Steve Springett free kick was well held by the keeper before a defender brought down Owusu for a penalty in the 89th minute. Last week Owusu had been fouled for a spot kick and Carpene had wanted the penalty, only for him to then give it up to Owusu, but this time Carpene held on to the ball and scored in almost the identical part of the goal as Owusu had!

Overall you could see that Merstham were at a higher level than us and they deserved their win. Having seen us play against their League rivals Corinthian Casuals and Met Police, I feel that Merstham are a better team than those two were and will be fine this season. Bearing in mind that we used twenty players in this contest, a 3-1 defeat was fairly promising under the circumstances. We now visit Spelthorne Sports in our next fixture, hoping to build on this.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Rory Edwards, Nick Inwugwu, Ollie Thompson, Ade Batula, Ash Snadden, Marlon Pinder, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Toby Colwell for Keogh (HT), Ben Amissah for Ofosu-Hernandez (HT), Reece Tierney for Thompson (HT), Steve Springett for Nelson-Roberts (HT), Tijani Eshilokun for Edwards (HT), Kiyo Brown for Batula (HT), Sirak Negassi for Adeyemi (HT), George Owusu for Stanley (HT), Tino Carpene for Pinder (HT), Ellis Rowland for Snadden (61)

Report Source: [www.eefconline.co.uk](http://www.eefconline.co.uk)