

Scoreline does not reflect performance

29 October 2023



Farnham Town 5-1 Epsom & Ewell. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 28th October 2023.

Our trip to the Memorial Ground, home to Farnham Town, was always going to be a challenging one. They have a large budget, a great team and will almost certainly go up as Champions. In four home League matches coming into this match they had scored seventeen goals and conceded none, so under the circumstances, a 5-1 defeat not only represented the first time any club had breached their home defences in this competition, but I will go further and say that the scoreline was harsh on our boys who battled hard for the entire ninety minutes and deserved more than the one goal we registered.

In fact we more than held our own for large parts of this game and although our hosts held the balance of possession over the match, it was only the clinical finishing of our opponents, and Darryl Sanders in particular with a first half hat trick, that proved to be the main difference between the teams.

Our Manager Steve Springett was back in the dugout and as you might expect after our win at Spelthorne Sports he made only one change with Marlon Pinder returning to the starting eleven in place of Sirak Negassi who was on the bench. We made a bright start with a good run on the left from Jaan Stanley after just 50 seconds, although his low cross was just cut out by a defender ahead of the oncoming Ade Batula.

The opening ten minutes were fairly even and it almost came as a surprise when Farnham took the lead in the twelfth minute from a free kick unnecessarily conceded, although still some way out. However, Harry Cooksley's free kick was delivered to the near post where Sanders met the ball with a deft, glancing header that gave Harvey Keogh no chance at all as the ball nestled in the far corner of the goal. Worse was to come just ninety seconds later as Sanders collected the ball from a throw in and sent a superb curling effort right into the top corner from nearly twenty-five yards to put the hosts two goals up.

Moments later we had a good chance after a poor clearance from Pat Nash which went straight to Stanley, but with a decent sight of goal he rushed his chance and scuffed the ball gently through to Nash who was able to recover his position by this time. We then had a moment of controversy when Keogh came out to punch the ball clear, only to be completely taken out by a Farnham player. Luckily our keeper was able to continue after treatment, yet not even a card was issued to the assailant. The cynic in me would call this a home town decision and this belief was enhanced when ten minutes later Tijani Eshilokun picked up a yellow card for a slightly late challenge that wasn't in the same category as the previous assault.

We were having some success with deliveries into the box as we picked up on the second ball once the initial deliveries were half cleared, and Eshilokun had the next chance as the ball fell to him just outside the penalty areas, but his volley wasn't hard enough to trouble Nash. We were actually having a real go at our hosts and Batula broke down the right, before cutting inside onto his left foot, but his attempt went wide of the near post. Keogh was down to make a good save from a powerful Farnham strike but we were soon up the other end again and Batula's shot was deflected for a corner that came to nothing.

The home side were on the attack soon after and sent a header just wide of Keogh's post, but just before half time a good passing move ended with Sanders almost walking the ball into the net to complete his hat trick and we went in at the break three goals down, which was incredibly harsh on our boys.

Just before the break we had replaced the injured Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez with Nick Inwugwu and for the first time in club history we then made a quadruple substitution as early as the 51st minute, leaving our bench hoping we didn't suffer any injuries in the remainder of the match. We have never made five changes to a line up this early in a competitive match before, but at 3-0 down, it was worth a gamble!

Farnham nearly extended their lead two minutes after this, but Adam Liddle was closed down well by Keogh and put his shot wide. In response a Rory Edwards corner was met by a Thompson Adeyemi header, but the flick on went beyond the far post and out for a goal kick. The next corner wasn't such a good one, but it was cleared to the edge of the area where substitute Negassi let fly with a powerful strike that was arrowing straight for the top corner, only for it to be diverted by the slightest deflection from the head of Sanders, who was now saving goals at one end instead of scoring them at the other!

The next corner again didn't get past the first man and as the home team broke away, Ethan Nelson-Roberts had to take one for the team as he cleared out the attacking player. Fortunately there were defenders covering and he received only a yellow card.

We attacked again and a great pass from Edwards to Negassi on the left resulted in him cutting inside his man and sending him the wrong way but his shot was well blocked by Nash from twelve yards. However, we conceded a fourth goal in the 62nd minute when a deep Farnham corner was headed back across goal, where it was then headed into the danger area and Liddle was able to nod the ball in from close range.

The clouds had been gathering during the second half and as was the case at Spelthorne Sports seven days previously, the heavens opened just after the hour mark, but in the 68th minute we had some reward for our hard work as some great interplay in midfield enabled the ball to be fed through to another substitute George Owusu who rounded the keeper before slotting the ball into the net with his left foot.

The game continued to swing from end to end and Keogh had to make another good save from Owen Dean before Nelson-Roberts produced a mazy run, beating three men before teeing up substitute Luke Miller, whose shot from twelve yards maybe should have been a little higher and Nash was able to get across to palm the ball away for a corner, which again didn't get past the first man. If there was a criticism today, it was that we didn't use our set pieces well enough.

There was still time for another opportunity at both ends. A nice Eshilokun pass to Negassi gave him the chance to embarrass Michael Kinsella again, although the end product was straight at Nash, and then in the second minute of injury time Dean broke through on the right hand channel and finished clinically past the exposed Keogh.

This was one of our better performances of the season. A few weeks ago we went to Jersey Bulls and subsided meekly without a shot on target, but this performance, against a team that will surely wrap up the League title before March is out and may even be walking out at Wembley Stadium in the FA Vase Final come May, proved that we are now competitive enough at this level to survive the season. We have a hard set of fixtures this month, but the most difficult of them all on paper has now passed, and whilst no one can ever be happy to be on the wrong end of a 5-1 defeat, I thought there were many positives that our team could take from this match.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Thompson Adeyemi, Zach Powell (c), Ollie Thompson, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Marlon Pinder, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Ofosu-Hernandez (45+1), Sirak Negassi for Batula (51), Luke Miller for Stanley (51), Reece Tierney for Powell (51), George Owusu for Pinder (51)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk