

Unarresting match with the police

Epsom & Ewell 0-0 Met Police. Emirates F.A. Cup – Preliminary Round. Friday 18th August 2023.

We had our first taste of Friday night football at the Madgwick this season as Isthmian League Met Police visited for this Emirates FA Cup tie and despite having the lion's share of the possession, rarely threatened in this goalless draw. This was the ninth time the clubs had met in this competition and we have only won two of the matches, with three draws now.

For our part, we were missing three players who were injured in Tuesday's League match and at times almost seemed content to cancel the opposition out and aim for a replay, where hopefully some of the walking wounded will be able to return.

The first bit of good news was that first choice keeper Harvey Keogh was back between the posts after dislocating his little finger in the Redhill warm up, but unfortunately Jaan Stanley, Callum Wilson and Tommy Williams were all unable to go, so Zach Powell took the armband on with Ayran Kugathas and Chester Clothier in place of the others. Additionally Ollie Thompson and Sirak Negassi moved onto the bench and Tino Carpena and Nick Inwugwu took their places.

Before the match commenced a minute's applause was held in recognition of regular supporter Mark Durbridge who passed away on Friday 11th August. A few former players and his family were present and all stood around the centre circle with the teams and officials for the duration of the applause.

We have had some slow starts this season and we got off to a nervy opening in this match too. Kugathas sent his header beyond Keogh and out for an unnecessary corner which was half cleared to the edge of the box where we then conceded a free kick. Fortunately, the strike on goal was dealt with easily enough by our keeper. However, in the seventh minute Bayley Mummery struck a shot against our far post and although the ball rebounded back into play, it appeared from where I was as though another player then struck our other post, but by this time the flag was raised for offside and the danger was over.

We had our first opportunity in the tenth minute when the ball was fed through to Kiyo Brown and he ran at goal, although his shot was too close to the experienced Liam Beach and he tipped the ball over for a corner which we were unable to take advantage of. Brown then had another run, but what looked like being a threatening ball in was blocked at the last second by a defender.

However, for the majority of the half we were on the defensive, happy to counter attack when the chance arose and looking quite difficult to break down. We also had a couple of yellow cards in the middle of the park with Rory Edwards getting one and then Alfie Walters for a cynical trip on Carpena who had threatened to get away on the left wing. This would have consequences for their defender later. There was nearly a third yellow card after Carpena was brought down by Laurence Ernest and the referee was there quickly to wave the card before being made aware that his Assistant had flagged belatedly for the ball going out of play.

Kugathas was next to pick up a yellow for pulling back his man as this stop-start game was never really allowed to get going. Regular visits from our physio ensured that an extra six minutes were played, but there was nothing of note within it and the teams trooped off at the break with honours even.

The second half started in a similar fashion and we weren't asking many questions of our visitors, although Brown got to the touchline once, but his low ball in was cut out by Beach. Next to try was Ade Batula, but his shot from a narrow angle was never going to beat the well-positioned keeper who blocked the ball out for a corner.

Brown picked up a yellow card for a clumsy tackle before Dan Stewart also found his way into the rapidly filling book, even though this was not a dirty game in any way. Unfortunately with fifteen minutes of normal time remaining Powell limped off and Ollie Thompson came on at the back, moving Inwugwu to a centre position within the back three and Clothier inherited the arm band. A sixth card followed for another visiting player for a foul on Ethan Nelson-Roberts and two further substitutions occurred for us with Ben Amissah coming on for Carpena and Jabari Ofose-Hernandez made his debut in relief of Nelson-Roberts.

We still appeared to be quite happy not to rush things and to settle for a replay, but nearly won the tie in the 92nd minute after Amissah was put through on goal. Regrettably, he stumbled and this enabled Beach to get a hand to the ball before our man could fully recover. However, the loose ball fell kindly for Batula who just needed to clip the ball over the retreating defenders from twenty-five yards, which he did, but it didn't come down in time and thumped the Met crossbar before going over for a goal kick.

There was time for an unusual incident in the 93rd minute as Walters had been injured and Beach told him to leave the pitch so as



not to play any of our players onside. However, he then came back on after the attack had been cleared and picked up a second yellow card for re-entering the field of play without permission. Harsh!

Ultimately, the fact that I am referring to all the yellow cards and substitutions tells you that there wasn't really much to report in terms of real opportunities in this match. It was constantly interrupted by injury and the somewhat fussy referee and the crowd of around 165 or so probably wondered whether they should have bothered to come out at all as the rain then gave them a thorough soaking as they walked 300 yards to reach their cars!

Most importantly though, the two teams remain in the hat for Monday's draw and will now meet again on Tuesday for the replay, which will have to be settled on the night, even if it takes extra time and penalties. There is one good omen here as the last time we met in the FA Cup back in 1989 we drew 0-0 at home before winning the replay 2-0 at Imber Court. Déjà vu anyone?

[For the replay report visit: www.eefconline.co.uk as Epsom and Ewell Times will be on a short production break.]

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Zach Powell (c), Nick Inwugwu, Ash Snadden, Kiyo Brown, Chester Clothier, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Tino Carpena

Subs: Ollie Thompson for Powell (75), Ben Amissah for Carpena (83), Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez for Nelson-Roberts (87)