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# Vital points for local football team

16 April 2023




On Saturday **Epsom and Ewell FC** secured an extremely important three points against promotion rivals Selsey, defeating them by the same score line of 3-2 that we had in deepest Sussex back in March. As with that match, this encounter contained some twists and turns but ultimately went our way due to another late winner, this time from **Lewis Pearch**, whose first goal for our club may turn out to be one of the most important of the season.

Going into this contest, we already knew that two wins from our remaining three matches would guarantee us the second playoff spot, barring a very unlikely swing of goal difference, but we also knew that Selsey still had aspirations to qualify themselves, so this was always going to be a tight encounter. With current Manager Barry Gartell away, Matt Chapman again took charge and we made just one change to the starting eleven from Wednesday's draw against Mile Oak with Steve Springett coming in for the absent Kevin Moreno-Gomez. However, Springett was not played in his regular left back slot in this match, instead playing in the centre of defence with Gideon Acheampong reverting to right back and Johnny "Sonic" Akoto moving over to the left, maybe as a design to try to use his speed to keep visiting danger man Shane Brazil as quiet as possible, and the pair of them had a decent battle today.

We needed a good start and for the first time in weeks, we got one in the ninth minute. A superb interchange of passes between Jaan Stanley and Jaevon Dyer on the right resulted in a ball across the edge of the penalty area to Athan Smith-Joseph, who took a touch, headed back across to the right before suddenly drilling the ball back across Syd Davies into the Selsey net from 18 yards.

Unfortunately that would prove to be the extent of Smith-Joseph's involvement as he aggravated his hamstring a few minutes later and limped off, to be replaced on the left wing by Pearch. Hopefully he will not be out for very long as it was clear that our replacement didn't really carry the same threat in a position that admittedly isn't his primary one.

Another injury would also prove pivotal in the 28th minute as a couple of our players went up with Davies for a right wing cross and Stanley collided with the keeper, catching him around the knee. I'll be honest, it looked fairly innocuous at the time but despite treatment Davies would require another bit of work with the physio shortly after and was strapped up for the remainder of the half before being replaced at half time by Ryan Matlock.

At this point, I was hoping that our players would get a chance to test him out with a couple of shots, but the visitors were actually getting back into the match and kept the ball away from him for a while. Then things got worse for us as they equalised from a harmless looking free kick over on the Selsey left wing in the 40th minute as Corey Burns nipped ahead of Tom Theobald to reach the near post delivery and flick it past him from close range, although it would have been nice to have seen a defender somewhere near him!

However, before half time we were back in front. Jamie Byatt collected the ball around twenty yards out in the third minute of injury time and decided that he did indeed want to test their limping keeper out, striking a beauty from twenty yards that just sailed over the rather stationary Davies. It was a superb piece of opportunism and of all the 40, yes 40 goals Byatt has now scored for us in under two seasons, this was probably the one that was from the furthest distance!

We were arguably a little fortunate to be ahead at the half, but it was irrelevant soon after anyway as the visitors equalised in the 51st minute. We had already had a scare when Brazil's shot had gone wide of the goal, but from a corner shortly afterwards, Theobald tried to punch the ball clear, only to knock the ball straight onto the shoulder of Bradley Vaughan from where the ball rebounded into the net.

At 2-2 this match really could have gone either way. We wobbled for a few minutes and Theobald redeemed himself with a superb double save after a Selsey shot had rebounded back to a striker off the foot of his right hand post, blocking the subsequent header and then a follow up shot which he turned wide for a corner.

With the clock on 68 minutes we brought on Thompson Adeyemi and Rory Edwards to give us fresh legs and Adeyemi set up Dyer who crumpled under a challenge from Matlock, even though there was no contact and was fortunate not to be booked for simulation, although Burns did pick up a card for Selsey around the same time for a handball.

As we started to enter the closing stages though, we began to get a little more possession and Springett sent a thirty yard free kick just wide of the post. With George Owusu already on for Dyer, Alex Penfold then came on for Nick Wilson with Springett moving over onto the left wing and releasing Pearch to a more central position alongside Byatt. This tactical move would prove pivotal in the 91st minute as a deep Penfold free kick was only headed half clear by Bradley Higgins-Pearce under pressure from Adeyemi and the ball fell to Pearch, standing just beyond the penalty spot and he guided his header over everyone and into the net for what proved to be the winner.

At the end there was a lot of celebration from our players, perhaps too much when considering that we still have much work to do to gain promotion. However, part of this probably came from the relief of winning a match that looked like it was turning against us and also guaranteed us a playoff spot, so it was understandable. Now we have to make sure that we get three more points to ensure that this home match wasn't our last ever at Fetcham Grove. We're not quite ready to leave just yet!

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Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Johnny Akoto, Nick Wilson, Dylan Merchant, Steve Springett, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Lewis Pearch for Smith-Joseph (17), Thompson Adeyemi for Stanley (68), Rory Edwards for Quintyne (68), George Owusu for Dyer (78), Alex Penfold for Wilson (85)

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