

Sunday 18th April 2004

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Premier Division) Match at Brimsdown Rovers F.C.

EDMONTON ROVERS	2	BRIMSDOWN ROVERS	5	HT 2-3
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S.Cokell (16 mins.),
S.Dorward (39 mins)

Ulatowski (12 mins.),
Bates (26 mins.),
Dodd (29 mins.),
Burke (86 mins.),
Faulkner (89 mins)

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (7½); Stuart DORWARD (7), Gary ADAMSON (6), Paul WOOLSTON (6½), Tony SPELLER (6); Eric IBEKWEM (7), Paul ELLERKER (6), Conor McGOVERN (7), Brian KAMUTEKU (6), Derek DORWARD (6); Steve COKELL (6½) **Subs.:** None !

Brimsdown Rovers' Line-Up Adam DALBY (GK); Luke COLLINS, Danny BATES, Nicky GOODHEW; Jimmy FAULKNER, Dave BLOWER, Lee TEAGLE, Peter ULATOWSKI, Billy WINGROVE; Paul DODD, Tony BURKE **Subs.:** Ben COTTERELL, Aaron BULLOCK, John EXCELL

Referee: Adrian UWINS

Assistant Referees: John STOCKMAN &
Russell HOWES

Weather Conditions: Constant Heavy Rain. No
wind.

Attendance: 20



Report: Our defeat to F.C. Boca Hill in midweek had resulted in this match being a possible championship decider for our opponents Brimsdown Rovers, who needed just one win from their three remaining matches (including this one) to clinch the Premier Division title. As for ourselves it was just another meaningless fixture thanks to our erratic form this season which had resulted in us finishing in mid-table whatever happened in this match. Indeed such was the apathy beforehand that nine of our squad decided to do something else for the day or rest injuries that they may have played through had we been in Brimsdown's position. With the Reserve Team also having a fixture on this date, that left us with just a bare eleven including Reserve Teamers Gary Adamson and Brian Kamuteku, while several others were struggling with niggling injuries or were not 100% fit because recent family & social commitments had resulted in them missing too many matches lately.

Brimsdown though, had not been in very good form before this match as they'd also been having problems trying to field eleven men, so the mood in our changing room beforehand was (apparently !) very positive with the 'team-talk' being something along the lines of 'go out and enjoy ourselves / nothing to lose / let's have a laugh at Brimsdown panicking trying to win the title if we get on top !

Of course once we got out onto the pitch and the game kicked off it was immediately apparent that Brimsdown had turned up with a very strong team this time, all of whom had arrived at the venue an hour before kick-off to get warmed up properly...although maybe they forgot that this was actually *our* Home game and a certain Edmonton Rovers Club Secretary had already put the nets up (while getting drenched in the process). That saw Brimsdown really pile on the pressure straight away, while especially taking advantage of the fact that we had three or four players having to play out of position because of the absence of others, and that appeared to be the cause of Brimsdown taking the lead after just 12 minutes when Peter Ulatowski tapped in a right-wing cross at the far post almost in slow-motion with the ball trickling into the bottom corner....this resulting in some strangely over-the-top goal celebrations which seemed to suggest they thought it might be their only one of the match !?

However, although we were fielding a 4-5-1 formation again (which scraped a 0-0 draw against Brimsdown last season in a 'boring' match), our tactics this time were very much different as we had nothing to lose and were quite prepared to throw men forward right from the start...if they were fit enough to get up and down the pitch that is ! In fact we had already come close to taking the lead ourselves just before Brimsdown managed to when a deflected shot from Eric Ibekwem rebounded away off the far post with keeper Adam Dalby completely beaten (*see picture above right*), and then when Steve Cokell equalised just four minutes after Ulatowski's goal after capitalising on a slip by Dalby in trying to retrieve an overhit backpass, it looked as if we could certainly give Brimsdown a close game, despite us fielding such a badly understrength side.

However, for every chance we created, Brimsdown had two...simply because they were fitter and sharper all round, although they had a bit of luck with both their second and third goals which were scored within the space of three minutes half-way through the First Half. Their second goal came from a corner which should not have been awarded (according to our players) as the preceding corner had 'clearly' swung out of play and come back in again...Brimsdown defender Danny Bates then taking advantage of our players still arguing with the referee and losing their concentration by volleying in the second corner through a crowd of players from the edge of the area, leaving Darryl Johnson totally unsighted.

Brimsdwn's third goal was then even *more* controversial (according to our players again) as Paul Dodd found himself clean through to easily lob Darryl Johnson as our back four stood there with their arms up in the air insisting he was 'two yards' offside while also disputing Referee Adrian Uwins' decision that one of our players had headed it backwards straight into Dodd's path anyway. (The only two spectators on the touchline at this time were Manager Trevor Hughes and the Cameraman...and we both thought our defenders were just being lazy and trying to come up with excuses to cover up the fact that they were all far too slow to sprint back with various Brimsdown forwards who were all nearly 20 years younger than them and playing regularly for Ryman or Spartan South Midlands League clubs on Saturdays !).

With Brimsdown having only conceded 13 goals in 15 League matches before this game, it therefore looked as if we might have been dead and buried already after finding ourselves 3-1 down, but such was our attack-minded attitude in this game (compared to normal) that we really caught them out in the 39th minute when we suddenly conjured up a good move which saw seven players all bombing forward at once in looking to get on the end of Conor McGovern's cross...which stand-in right-back Stuart Dorward eventually scrambled in on the goal-line to pull the score back to 3-2.

That was how it stayed until Half-Time, but the pattern continued in the Second Half with both sides creating chances but with Brimsdown having more of them. That saw Darryl Johnson have a lot more work to do as the game went on, making three or four vital saves despite the increasingly heavy rain making it really difficult for goalkeepers. That actually seemed to result in Brimsdown getting a bit jittery with the scoreline still only 3-2 in their favour with 10 minutes to go and we started to get on top for a spell. Indeed they really started sweating when Stuart Dorward went on an excellent run in the 83rd minute before striking a left-footed shot no more than an inch wide with keeper Dalby completely beaten, while Eric Ibekwem should have done better with a far post header which he sent wide. Unfortunately though, we rather overdid it in pushing men forward to look for an equaliser and it was no surprise when Brimsdown caught us out in the 86th minute when Gary Adamson was left facing a three-against-one situation on the break but had not played as sweeper enough to know how to step up and play people offside properly, leaving forward Tony Burke clean through on goal to round Darryl Johnson and then easily evade the 'knackered' Adamson, Paul Woolston and Tony Speller as they ran back before tapping the ball into an empty net.

That goal really came about because we had no substitutes available whereas Brimsdown had three, all of whom came on in the last five minutes, and while our players were secretly pleading with Referee Uwins to blow the Final Whistle and put us out of our misery / physical agony, Brimsdown went and made it 5-2 in the 89th minute when the pacy Jimmy Faulkner (who plays for Enfield on Saturdays) raced away to blast a fiercely struck shot past Darryl Johnson from an acute angle....just as Trevor Hughes was mentioning the fact that we had not lost a game this season by more than two goals !

The Final Whistle then signalled a title-winning champagne celebration in front of the camera, although not by us of course...in fact our players shot off back to the changing rooms and down the pub as soon as possible rather than watch all of that going on, and having finished level on points with Brimsdown last season it was very frustrating to finish so far behind them this time when we know that ourselves and the likes of Percival, Enfield Rangers Old Boys and F.C. Boca Hill are all as good as them on our day and should have given them more of a challenge. We didn't really intend this to be a 'transitional' season when we started back in September, but the long absences of quality players such as Marco Ellerker, Chris 'Nugget' Beeden, Peter Sutton, Robin Pryke & John Beasley ended up making it just that, and as we reflect on this our final game of the season, it looks as if we might have a long wait before we finish as high as third in the Premier Division again on this evidence.