

Sunday 4th September 2005

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Pound Close, Hoddesdon

BROXBOURNE RANGERS OLD BOYS

2

EDMONTON ROVERS

2

HT 0-2

*Williamson (65 mins.),
Hockley (88 mins.)*

S.Cokell (8, 37 mins.)

BROXBOURNE RANGERS OLD BOYS' LINE-UP: Phil PLEDGER (First Half GK), Alan VELLA (Second Half GK); Andrew PEDLEY, Adam GARRETT, *VELLA/PLEDGER*, Jamie DIXON; Darren MATTHEWS, Mark WILLIAMSON, Adam SMITH, Dave MILSON; John HOCKLEY, Jim PEARSON **Sub.:** Nigel Mc,GHEE

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (6½); Colin BESTER (6½), Stuart DORWARD (7½), Paul WOOLSTON (7½), Terry MOORE (7½); Foyso! AHMED (6½), Gary COKELL (7), Tony SPELLER (7½), Peter MURPHY (7); Vernon 'Kizza' NXUMALO (7); Steve COKELL (7)
Subs. (Not Used): Tem ADIL, Daniel GEORGE, Ritchie COPUES

Referee: Kevin DOHERTY

Weather Conditions: Sunny & Very Hot

Attendance: 15



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

Following a nightmare Summer for the club, we came into this, our first League match of the season, genuinely fearful of another heavy 'morale-denting' defeat (as had happened in Pre-Season and in the Premier Division last season), despite our opponents Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys only having finished in mid-table in Division One at the end of the last campaign. After all, we had just been relegated, we had suffered our heaviest defeat since joining the Mercury Waltham League way back in 1988, we had been stuffed 9-0 in our last Pre-Season Friendly match, we had only won once in our last 43 matches, we had seen five loyal club members walk out on us in the last few weeks because

we are 'crap', we had to drop the Reserve Team out of the League due to a lack of players (costing the club a lot of money in the process) and for this particular game we had five first-choice players missing in Conor McGovern (*On holiday*), Derek Dorward (*Working*), Paul Ellerker (*Attending a Stag Do*), Robin Pryke (*Refusing to play until we can arrange a training session for him to test out his dodgy ankle*) & Nick Vertigans (*Working in Geneva*).

With our starting line-up featuring 41-year-old Reserve Team player Peter Murphy (who had never even *met* half our First Team players before this match), Foysol Ahmed (Another Reserve Team player making a rare First Team appearance) and recent signing Terry Moore (making only his third appearance for the club), we could have been excused for having a lack of teamwork, even though Foysol and Terry had been playing in the 7-a-side League regularly for us with the others during the Summer. Despite all these problems though, we started the match superbly with everyone 'gelling' straight away, and we really caught Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys out with our extra fitness from playing 7-a-side and also by showing a surprisingly refreshing determination to play the ball around on the floor with plenty of good controlled possession and one and two-touch short passing moves...something which we last did

on a regular basis about three seasons ago !!?

In fact it was obvious straight away that the reason for that was the absence of certain individuals who over the last year or so had played with the attitude that if they thought one of their teammates was 'crap' then why pass the ball to him? (This invariably leading to players trying to take on one player too many, losing possession, conceding a goal and then starting a 'mass inquest'/major bollocking session).

On this occasion though, the likes of Peter Murphy, Foysol Ahmed, Colin Bester, Gary Cokell and others all proved that they at least **are** capable of good enough control & passing and/or being able to use their brains well enough to be able to play regularly at this level, with 'Murf' being a particular revelation....this being a welcome bonus as it was feared he would want to leave the club on the demise of the Reserve Team, having been brought along initially by the now-departed Lee Osborn and not really knowing anybody else because of his residence in far-away Billericay causing an inability to attend training or play in the Summer 7-a-side League. Thankfully Murf



had kept himself fit (and a lot slimmer than our 16-year-old substitute Tem Adil ?!) by regularly playing 5-a-side, and with the diminutive Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo also being an unknown quantity to our opponents and playing in a free role between midfield and attack, we ended up being the better side in the First Half, coming off at Half-Time 2-0 ahead and deservedly so. Our first goal came after only eight minutes when Steve Cokell confirmed he had now recovered from a Pre-Season groin injury by firing a cross-shot into the far bottom corner from an acute angle, and he then added a second in the 37th minute with another low shot from close range after a good positive run by 'Kizza', although Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys'

keeper Phil Pledger didn't look too convincing for either effort. Indeed Pledger was actually an outfield player who had been forced to go in goal, and as it happened, he was one of their *better* outfield players, a fact that was proved in the Second Half when he played as a central defender while Alan Vella took over 'between the sticks'. Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys also made other tactical changes at Half-Time which seemed to be mainly along the lines of stopping 'Kizza' having such an influence on the game while pushing men forward a lot more in an effort to get back into the match. However, with Stuart Dorward, Paul Woolston and Terry Moore all in commanding form at the back we were able to cope fairly comfortably until the 65th minute when keeper Darryl Johnson suddenly had a bit of a nightmare and scuffed a clearance straight to Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys midfielder Mark Williamson, who from near the half-way line somewhere sent an admittedly excellent first-time lob/chip straight back over Darryl's head and into the top corner to make it 2-1. (Darryl's excuse for this actually appeared to be suspected food poisoning from Scott Robertson's cooking at a party the night before ?).

Of course that really fired Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys up and we were then up against it, even though we continued to look dangerous on the break ourselves. In fact we really should have wrapped the game up on two or three occasions when they were caught out by the pace of 'Kizza' and Foysol, only for them both to invariably dally too long in getting a shot in and waste the opportunity.

At the other end though, Darryl Johnson redeemed himself with one particularly excellent save from a close-range 'bullet' header as Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys put us under real pressure with a

succession of corners, long throw-ins and free-kicks...for which we had too many small players in our line-up to be able to deal with them as comfortably as usual, but it looked as if we had got away with it until the 88th minute when Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys scored a controversial equaliser as referee Doherty failed to spot a blatant foul on 'Kizza' in attack, which then led to the ball being hoofed downfield for John Hockley to run onto and score (albeit thanks to some dodgy defending by us). In fact 'Kizza' had been getting continually fouled in the Second Half, but most of it was being 'cleverly done' behind the referee's back and there was no way that he could spot most of it. Indeed Mr. Doherty had refereed fairly well up until then, but some of our players just couldn't accept that particular decision (and one or two others that failed to go our way shortly afterwards) and Gary Cokell actually ended up getting booked as a result for 'talking in derogatory terms to Tony Speller about the referee in a loud voice' ?!!

As it happened though, Mr. Doherty did make a very good decision in the second minute of Injury Time when he spotted a trip on 'Kizza' in the area by Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys skipper Jamie Dixon and correctly awarded us a penalty which Steve Cokell stepped up to take so that he could complete his hat-trick and give us a morale-boosting 3-2 win. With an outfield player in goal who was wearing normal shorts on a stony bone-hard pitch and didn't look remotely like he was going to dive one way or the other, it was surely a formality for Steve to just roll the ball into the



bottom corner, but instead he ran up and blasted it 10 feet over the bar and onto the roof of a school 40 yards away !? As I write this report (10 hours later), Manager Trevor Hughes is round here scratching his head saying 'I still can't believe what he was thinking of' !

Despite the final scoreline being so much like a number of our Premier Division matches last season where we failed to win by the finest of margins, it was a hugely encouraging performance given the circumstances with which we came into this game, and maybe this won't turn out to be such a bad season after all ?

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: And so, after a will he, won't he

summer, Michael Owen finally did an Osborn. Yes, the England striker mirrored our own ex-Rover's decision to take his clip of the week strewn performances elsewhere in search of regular football rather than stay and fight for his place. This was just one result of the summer's machinations at Rovers, one inextricably linked to the major event, the Hughes Brothers decision to disband the Reserves as others followed Osborn out of the club enticed by perceptions of greener grass, comfy armchairs and regular Tescos runs with the missus.

Those that remained gathered at Pound Close, Hoddesdon for the first game of the season away to Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys, an outfit who'd finished mid-table in Division One. Now your scribe has seen most things in his career but today brought a first. Never, in 25 years of senior football, had I arrived at a ground to witness one of the council's finest breaking open the changing rooms with industrial wire cutters. It wasn't an easy job but the parkie was not to be denied. On a belting hot day he demonstrated admirable grit, determination and not a little effort and, after expending a small bucketful of sweat, he finally broke through. As the parkie collapsed in a heap of recoil, Rovers filed in but Rangers, no doubt accustomed to such a stringent entrance policy, had already opted for pitch side and the deployment of some delicately placed towels to shield Mrs Bester's wandering eye.

The pre-match briefing saw Manager Hughes set up his troops in a Sven-like 4-5-1 formation, the aim being to make the most of Kizza's delicate footwork in a free role behind lone striker Steve Cokell. But before all that could be played out we had a presentation ceremony to perform.

Modesty prevents me naming the recipient of the prestigious award for last season's Reserve Team top goal scorer. Modesty and the tally of three including two pens. And, in keeping with marking the entire league's lowest highest scorer, the trophy measures exactly 4 inches from base to tip.

When the match itself finally got underway Rovers dominated, playing some neat football and displaying good movement within the formation. The back four didn't miss a header or a tackle, 'keeper Darryl Johnson was only once troubled by the uneven bounce of a back pass and it seemed only a matter of time before the goals came. And come they did. On 8 minutes Steve Cokell ignored the beseeching cries of an overlapping old timer, preferring instead to allow the ball to drop and despatch a thunderous shot past the keeper's despairing dive. Then, in the 37th, Cokell made it two with a strike decidedly less thunderous. Indeed, it wouldn't be unfair to say this underhit toe-poke benefited in no small part from a helpful hillock laying about 6 feet in front of the 'keeper. This flipped the ball up and over said 'keeper who'd already decided on the length and trajectory of his dive. But they all count.

At the half-time whistle Rovers led 2-0 but their dominance deserved greater reward. If only a late move involving interplay between Kizza and Murf, featuring a neat back heel from the latter, had brought the goal it deserved but, sadly, Foysol Ahmed's shot was tame and did not find the Cokell hillock. The mood in the camp was good and, while Manager Hughes dispensed some words of wisdom, Stuart Dorward chomped apishly on a banana.

The 2nd half was an altogether tougher affair. The wind, such as it was, was against and, just as Rovers had benefited in the first half, so did Broxbourne in the second. Now it was the home side on the front foot and Rovers' back line had to endure a deluge of long balls and defence turning passes. This they coped with despite the toll of their first half exertions in strength sapping conditions and, indeed, Rovers created several openings for themselves though a thirst for time in the box saw most squandered. Eventually, however, the pressure told and Rangers pulled one back after a two man move culminating in an impressive lob from distance. The sad thing for Rovers is that one of the two men in that move was 'keeper Darryl Johnson whose daisy cutter kick out unerringly found its man.

From there the game continued in similar fashion and, on an opening day ripe for cricket, victory seemed within grasp. But, in the 88th minute, Kizza was subjected to yet another body line challenge and, as the referee waved Rovers appeals away, the ball was swept forward. As it dropped to earth a twisting Stuart Dorward got a nose to it but no distance and the ball dropped

kindly for Rangers who made no mistake in taking full advantage.

Though the equaliser came late there was more drama still to come. Darryl Johnson made a fine reflex save from a corner and then Kizza's elusive feet finally tempted an inopportune tackle in the Rangers box. The ref had no decision to make. Penalty. And so, in the 92nd minute, Steve Cokell stepped up ready to write his own headlines. "Hat-trick hero grabs late winner", maybe, or "Cokell strikes in Rover-time to win it". How about, " 'Ave it!!" They're still looking for the ball now.