

Sunday 14th March 2004

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Premier Division) Match at Clowes Sports Ground, Palmers Green N13

ENFIELD RANGERS OLD BOYS	2	EDMONTON ROVERS	2	HT 0-0
Leadbetter (55, 64 mins.)		S.Cokell (70 mins.), D.Dorward (83 (Pen.) mins.)		

Enfield Rangers Old Boys Line-Up: Ian MITCHELL (GK); Dave TOWNSEND, Craig STEVENS, Matt KEOGH, Paul CANAVAN; Steve LIVERMORE Jnr., Luke SWIFT, Mark FLOOD, Dave CHAPMAN; Andy LEADBETTER, Jackson GASH **Subs. Used:** Gavin BIGNALL, Peter CORDWELL (GK)

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (7); Chidi IBEKWEM (7), Tony SPELLER (7½), Paul WOOLSTON (8), Steve BEASLEY (7); Leon Mc,KENZIE-Mc,KAY (6½), Paul ELLERKER (6½), Eric IBEKWEM (7), John BEASLEY (7); Derek DORWARD (7), Steve COKELL (7) **Sub. Used:** Lexton HARRISON (6)

Referee: Michael MACKEY Jnr.

Weather Conditions: Cloudy with Gale-Force Wind

Attendance: 15



Report: Following our Reserve Team's 6-0 win in the League Reserve Cup Semi-Final the previous week, one or two ill-judged comments had been made by Reserve Team players before this match that they would give our First Team a close game because too many First Team players had family and social commitments every week, thereby causing a lack of teamwork, fitness and match practice in comparison.

However, despite those problems, the First Team had actually only suffered two defeats in their previous eight matches before this game, these being a 4-2 defeat to Premier Division leaders F.C. Boca Hill and an unlucky and narrow 1-0 loss to Percival, so things were nowhere near as bad as they might have seemed.

What some of the Reserve Team players failed to realise of course was the quality of opposition the First Team were having to play against, and indeed for this match, third-placed Enfield Rangers Old Boys fielded more or less a full-strength side with only the suspended Dean Stuber missing from their normal starting line-

up, while they were still in contention for the Premier Division title and obviously treating this game very seriously. With ourselves stuck in mid-table with nothing much to play for though, most of our players decided to either work, rest injuries or visit friends and relatives for a Sunday roast instead ! That saw us having to do without the likes of key players such as Stuart Dorward, Conor McGovern, Peter Sutton, Marco Ellerker, Robin Pryke and Chris Beeden, while Gary Cokell was also absent, leaving Manager Trevor Hughes to run the line yet again. We were therefore fortunate that the Reserves were without a fixture this week, so we therefore had the pick of their players without hindering their chances to escape relegation...the three chosen being Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay, who was named in the starting line-up, and Lexton Harrison and Matt Steell, who were named as substitutes.

We also had to contend with a very heavy, boggy pitch after torrential overnight rain and also a gale-force wind against us in the First Half, so it wouldn't have been a surprise if we had come off at Half Time one or two goals down. However, our makeshift starting line-up defended superbly in the First Half apart from a couple of bad mistakes by Tony Speller and Chidi Ibekwem in which they tried to put their foot on the ball instead of clearing it first-time and then let it roll embarrassingly underneath their feet to present Enfield Rangers Old Boys players with clear-cut chances. Fortunately though, our opponents rarely threatened Darryl Johnson because of some wayward shooting, although we forced them into that most of the time by defending deep and getting in good challenges in the centre of midfield where the competitive pairing of Paul Ellerker and Eric Ibekwem were highly effective. In fact it was Eric who set up our best chance of three or four we had on the break in the First Half when he put John Beasley through, but keeper Ian Mitchell made an excellent save with his legs.

With Mitchell having to go off with a recurrence of an ankle injury at Half-Time though and Trevor Hughes having produced a positive Half-Time team talk in which everybody actually listened for a change, we were expecting to take control with the wind behind us, but instead Enfield Rangers Old Boys upped a gear and started catching us out at the back with their experience and clever movement. That made things especially difficult for our 'Club Linesman for the day' Trevor Hughes, who was trying to run the line in training shoes on a muddy pitch and against a fierce wind, while he also needed windscreen wipers for his glasses when light rain started falling. Despite that though, he managed to spot that Enfield Rangers Old Boys forward Andy Leadbetter was 'two yards offside' when he tapped in a left wing cross from close range in the 55th minute, but was over-ruled by referee Michael Mackey Junior for some reason and the goal was allowed to stand. In fairness to Referee Mackey Jnr. though, he actually controlled the game very well in terms of lecturing players without booking or sending off anybody when things started to get a bit too competitive during the Second Half...as Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay found out to his cost after he'd 'reacted' to a few wind-ups from Enfield Rangers Old Boys experienced defenders, this being all part of a good learning process for Leon which should do him good in the long term. Leon was

then replaced by Lexton Harrison for the last 25 minutes though, but unfortunately Enfield Rangers Old Boys had already added a second goal by then as Leadbetter scored another in the 64th minute from an identical move by sneaking round the back of our defence un-noticed to get on the end of a right wing cross, but this time he was clearly onside and there were no arguments.

At that stage it looked as if we were heading for a certain defeat as Darryl Johnson was starting to have to make a few good saves, mainly from left-sided midfielder Dave Chapman, but then Steve Cokell suddenly evaded the offside trap from Eric Ibekwem's through ball to lob substitute keeper Peter Cordwell in the 70th minute against the run of play and we were back in the match at only 2-1 down. That saw our heads lift dramatically and we threw men forward for the rest of the match instead of sitting back as a damage limitation exercise, with Cokell also being involved in our equaliser in the 83rd minute as he was tripped in the area by substitute Gavin Bignall for an obvious penalty. As the few 'supporters' on the touchline (i.e. Russell Beeden & Paul Rebairo !) debated who was going to take it though (from a choice of Steve Cokell, John Beasley or Paul Woolston as they were they only players we had on the pitch who were seemingly capable of taking a penalty kick without slicing it towards the corner flag !?), Derek Dorward then stepped up (to the 'groans' of 'Oh no, not Del' !) and fired it straight down the middle hoping keeper Cordwell would move out of the way...which he obligingly did to make the score 2-2 !

Enfield Rangers Old Boys then (naturally) started having a few arguments between themselves and went to pieces a bit after that, and indeed we had the best chance to win the match as the game drifted into Injury Time, but Steve Cokell's legs were not quite long enough to get a decisive touch at the far post as he slid in to connect with Eric Ibekwem's cross.

Nevertheless, a 2-2 draw against one of the top teams in the Division while fielding a badly-understrength side was an excellent result and our effort, commitment and attitude in this match was very encouraging, especially with a Roy Bailey Challenge Cup Quarter-Final coming up against the same opponents. It was a pity that hardly any Reserve Team players (apart from those playing) bothered to turn up and watch...and learn something about the standard of football they should be aiming for ! (Ask Matt Steell though, not Rebairo !)