

Sunday 28th March 2004

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Roy Bailey Challenge Cup Quarter-Final) Match at Clowes Sports Ground, Palmers Green N13

ENFIELD RANGERS OLD BOYS	1	EDMONTON ROVERS	2	HT 0-2
Canavan (63 mins.)		E.Ibekwem (39 mins.), G.Cokell (45 mins.)		

Enfield Rangers Old Boys Line-Up: Ian MITCHELL (GK); Paul CANAVAN, Mark FLOOD, Craig STEVENS, Dylan Mc,DONAGH; Dave TOWNSEND, Luke SWIFT, Dave CHAPMAN, Matt KEOGH; Andy LEADBETTER, Jackson GASH **Subs.:** None

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (7½); Chidi IBEKWEM (8), Stuart DORWARD (8), Paul WOOLSTON (8), Scott ROBERTSON (8); Gary COKELL (7½), Marco ELLERKER (7½), Paul ELLERKER (8½), Conor Mc,GOVERN (7½), Eric IBEKWEM (7½); Steve COKELL (8) **Subs. Used:** Gary ODELL (6½), Gary ADAMSON (6½)

Referee: Denis COVENTRY

Assistant Referees: Bob BRAND & Barry GROSSMITH

Weather Conditions: Overcast, but no wind !

Attendance: 14



Report: After such a dreadful performance the previous week, we were really worried that we would go and throw away our best chance of reaching a Cup Final since we joined the Mercury Waltham League 16 years ago...the winners of this Quarter-Final having been drawn to face mid-table Division Two side Rosemill in the Semis. That was because player after player dropped out during the week, leaving us without seven of our 17-man First Team squad, while we also had a problem in that no Reserve Team regulars were able to play as it would cup-tie them for the forthcoming League Reserve Cup Final. That saw Scott Robertson, Gary Odell and Gary Adamson all brought into the squad for rare First Team appearances...Robertson because he was missing the League Reserve Cup Final anyway due to a ski-ing holiday and Odell and Adamson because they had not played enough matches this season to be in contention to play in the League Reserve Cup Final !

On paper then, they were not the sort of players to be bringing in against a team who had only lost two League matches all season in the Premier Division and who were fielding a strong-looking starting line-up, but we did have one or two things in our favour, namely the small pitch (compared to the previous week !) and 'perfect weather for football' (i.e. No wind, cloudy & cold). In fact, due to them turning up with just a bare eleven, Enfield Rangers Old Boys had to play key defender Matt Keogh out on the left wing because of a head injury he had presumably received playing in Senior Saturday football the day before, and that undoubtedly helped us to create a number of good chances in an excellent First Half display in which we scored two and could have had three or four more had it not been for some feeble attempts in front of goal by virtually all of our forwards or attacking midfielders at some stage.

It therefore wasn't until the 39th minute that we managed to take the lead when a quickly-taken free-kick by Marco Ellerker caught out the Enfield Rangers Old Boys defence, leaving Eric Ibekwem to round keeper Ian Mitchell and produce a good finish. However, we had a real slice of luck with our second goal just before the Half-Time whistle as keeper Mitchell seemed to disappear temporarily and allowed a sliced cross from Gary Cokell to sail over his head and into the net from out on the right wing somewhere...this resulting in some strangely manic celebrations from Steve Cokell, who had presumably never seen his older brother score before !?

Although we were missing the likes of Peter Sutton (Up North looking for a house), Derek Dorward & Tony Speller (Attending Weddings) and Robin Pryke, John Beasley, Steve Beasley & Chris Beeden (All out injured), not to mention Manager Trevor Hughes (Still on holiday in Las Vegas), it appeared that stand-in Manager Russell Beeden had pulled a 'tactical masterstroke' by opting to return to the 'boring' 4-5-1 formation that served us so well last season as we had been by far the better side in the First Half, but Enfield Rangers Old Boys changed their formation to cope with that in the Second Half by putting Matt Keogh back in defence where he was far more effective and by switching to a 4-3-3 formation...which then gradually became a 3-3-4 as they really piled on the pressure in the Second Half as our many players who had not been playing regularly this season understandably started to tire. That saw Enfield Rangers Old Boys miss one or two good chances early in the Second Half before Paul Canavan pulled a goal back for them in the 63rd minute when he latched on to a cleverly-flighted free-kick from Dylan Mc,Donagh to toe-poke the ball past a hesitant Darryl Johnson. However, Darryl then started making up for that with one or two good saves and some excellent catches under pressure, while we then started having one or two chances ourselves on the break, most notably when Gary Cokell nearly scored a second goal with an 'exquisite' chip that had keeper Mitchell beaten all ends up, but the ball rebounded away off the crossbar...this of course from a player who Trevor Hughes had been assuming was a left-back ! However, Russell Beeden's decision to play him on

the right of midfield and also gamble with Conor McGovern and Marco Ellerker both playing in the centre of midfield, even though they normally 'get in each others way'...according to Marco !?, paid off really well in terms of us being really competitive in there, while Eric Ibekwem played well back out on the left despite his improved form recently as a central midfielder. It therefore looked like a real blow when Eric had to come off with a pulled hamstring after 76 minutes, but the introduction of substitutes Gary Odell (for Eric) and Gary Adamson (10 minutes later for Gary Cokell) saw us keep our shape and defend superbly, despite Reserve Team players Paul Rebairo & Lee Osborn and assorted Percival players shouting a load of 'bollocks' from the touchline to change it to a 4-4-2 because we were under too much pressure !

Thankfully though, the players on the pitch didn't agree and all four of our defenders were excellent, particularly in the Second Half with some superbly timed tackles and blocks as we held out for a memorable victory against the odds. Man-Of-The-Match though (a universal decision) was Paul Ellerker in the midfield holding role, who showed just how much better he could play without having had 'much of a' drink the night before...even though it was actually his 29th Birthday ! For that though, he received a kiss on the cheek from his over-elated skipper Stuart Dorward on the Final whistle (*See picture left !*), Stuart presumably being in an even better mood than normal anyway after receiving £100 for acting as a Roman gladiator in a TV production the day before...and getting unintentionally 'stabbed' in the armpit by a 63-year-old Celtic warrior in the process !?

It was a great mood in the changing rooms and down the pub afterwards though (for those Reserve Team players who think the First Team are a bunch of 'miserable old gits' !?) and there is no doubt that the Reserve Team's success in getting through to a Cup Final has spurred the First Team on to emulate that achievement. All we need now is for three or four key players to make themselves available for the Semi-Final (our next match this coming Sunday) and we can certainly do it !