

Sunday 12th March 2006

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Albany Park, Enfield

EUROPA	4	EDMONTON ROVERS	4	HT 2-3
Myford (1, 55 mins.), Carter (19, 68 mins.)		S.Dorward (26 (Pen.) mins.), Woolston (33 mins.), Ahmed (35 mins.), Ellerker (71 mins.)		

EUROPA'S LINE-UP: Marcello DEVIZIO; Giulio SANTANGELO, Carlo CASALI, Bruno AMORELLI, Peter SZUMSKI; Will WHAY, Mario CULORA, Paul NIGRO, Tony CARTER; Darren RORIE, Michael MYFORD
Subs.: Ricky DEAR, Gary BRACE (Not Used), Max DEVIZIO (Not Used)

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Ozel OZERMAN (GK) (8); Paul WOOLSTON (6½), Stuart DORWARD (6), Andrew WARMERDAM (5½); Colin BESTER (6½), Paul ELLERKER (7), JUNEKA JUNIOR (6½), Peter MURPHY (6½); Derek DORWARD (6); Foysol AHMED (7), Steve COKELL (7) **Sub.:** Kris SPYROU (6)

Referee: Kevin DOHERTY

Weather Conditions: Cloudy & Cold

Attendance: 20



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

We named a squad of 17 for this mid-table fixture at our Reserve Team's old Albany Park stomping ground, but as usual, by the time it got to Sunday morning, that was down to just a bare eleven with no goalkeeper and numerous first-choice players unavailable. The first to pull out was Conor McGovern almost as soon as the squad was announced, as he had still not recovered from a long-term ankle injury, but the other five in Daniel George (Family Commitments), Chris 'Nugget' Beeden ('Knee Hurting'), Ritchie Copues (Bad Back), James Walker (computer and/or car presumably not working again ?) and keeper Simon Jackson ('Flu

symptoms when he woke up') were all drop-outs either late on Saturday night or on the morning of the match, thereby causing us major problems...and a late kick-off by 10 minutes for which we may well get fined.

During the two-week break without a game before this fixture, we decided to advertise for a new goalkeeper for next season because of 'Jacko' and Darryl Johnson's unreliability over the past two seasons, something which prompted Jacko to promise that he would start playing regularly from now on now he had got the worry about becoming a father for the first time out of the way, so his absence for this match was the most frustrating of all, especially as Darryl was already out for the season and recent stand-ins Tony Speller and Gary Cokell were also out injured (and in Speller's case also suffering from a severe hangover no doubt after his Stag Do the night before). At that stage, our only options were for the equally pissed Stuart Dorward to go in goal, although Brazilian Juneka Junior was willing to do so if necessary, presumably on the basis that he comes from a country similar to Australia and the U.S.A. where people grow up being taught to use their hands to play with their balls in some of their more popular sports !? With the clock ticking towards 10.15.a.m. (just 15 minutes before the scheduled kick-off), it was time for me to scour through the list of our 40 registered players for this season to see if there was anybody we could call up to go in goal, and the name of our 17-year-old Turkish 7-a-side League keeper Ozel Ozerman appeared to be worth a try...even though we had never used him in an 11-a-side match before because he only stands about 5 foot 2 inches tall and we would therefore be taking a huge risk. As it turned out, 'Oz' was in when Colin Bester phoned him, and as he lived more or less

right next-door to Albany Park it was problem solved as far as a keeper was concerned and we were even able to name Kris Spyrou as a half-decent substitute in the end instead of fielding just a bare eleven.

However, two weeks without a game (or even any training thanks to Champions League matches



on TV) were always going to make us rather rusty, especially with Europa having played twice during that time, while astonishingly we were fielding just four survivors from the squad of 12 we put out against Europa in the 3-1 defeat at Hazelwood in December, something which really hit home just how much damage not having a settled side has done to our season.

With key players Terry Moore and Nick Vertigans both away on holiday for this match, Manager Trevor Hughes was therefore forced into trying yet another experimental formation, this time going for a 3-4-1-2 line-up with Derek Dorward playing in a free attacking midfield role behind Steve Cokell and Foysol Ahmed,

who was being played up front instead of his normal wide midfield role.

Unfortunately though, this saw us 'all over the place' virtually as soon as the game kicked off, with Ozel Ozerman having to make a good save after just 13 seconds and then letting in a goal only about 30 seconds later as we were torn apart by a swift move from a typically fired-up Europa, who of course fielded all three of their ex-Rovers players as usual in Carlo Casali, Darren Rorie and keeper Marcello Devizio in what appeared to be near enough their normal side.

The scorer of that first goal (with a simple side-footed finish from a right-wing cross) was forward Michael Myford, who had scored a hat-trick against us in a Pre-Season Tournament game...a fixture in which again only four of our players from this match played in. When 'Oz' then had to make *another* good save after just *three* minutes it looked as if we were going to be in for a real hiding, especially with almost half our team suffering hangovers from various parties and Stag Do's the night before, but thankfully we gradually started sorting ourselves out and managed to get a bit of teamwork going, although it was still Ozel who was the busier keeper and it was probably no surprise when Europa went 2-0 up in the 19th minute when Tony Carter volleyed in from close range, although there certainly looked to be a foul on Colin Bester in the build-up that Referee Doherty missed...in addition to an offside that we should have been given earlier in the move when we did not have the advantage that Mr. Doherty thought we had.

Although our players felt a bit peeved about that, as usual we didn't carry on our complaints and just got on with things (unlike our opponents in this match !) and we were rewarded in the 26th minute when Derek Dorward went clean through only to be caught by keeper Devizio and knocked off balance as he tried to round him which allowed a defender to get back and make a tackle. Referee Doherty then pointed to the spot, but everyone seemed unclear as to whether he gave the penalty for the attempted foul by Devizio or the 'tackle' by the defender, and although Devizio should have been sent off for a professional foul if it was *him*, Stuart Dorward sent him the wrong way anyway with a well-struck spot kick into the bottom right-hand corner to make it 2-1.

Europa couldn't stop complaining about that decision though and it really seemed to unsettle them as we had an excellent 10-minute spell thereafter. Firstly Juneka Junior hit the bar with a spectacular long range free-kick (presumably our players listened to my advice to let a Brazilian take our free-kicks ?), then defender Paul Woolston managed to equalise in the 33rd minute with a typical 'bullet' header at the far post from Steve Cokell's expertly driven corner, and then just two minutes after that we actually went 3-2 ahead when Foysol Ahmed scored his third goal in his last three starts with a good finish into the bottom corner after seemingly anticipating a mistake from keeper Devizio in trying to deal with Carlo Casali's backpass under pressure from Derek Dorward.

Thanks to some more good saves by Ozel Ozerman and a couple of 'bad misses ?' by Steve

Cokell, that ended up being the score at Half-Time and we came off wondering why we had been so gloomy before the match, as Europa looked to have gone downhill a bit from the two previous times we had played them this season.



However, the wind started strengthening as soon as the Second Half started, and with that being in Europa's favour, we were always likely to find it harder after the break. It was a bit of a silly-looking goal from which they equalised in the 55th minute to make it 3-3 though, as our defenders seemed to leave Carlo Casali's long free-kick into the area for Ozel Ozerman to come out and catch jumping high above a forward to do so, but a 6 foot 4 inches tall Darryl Johnson he is *not* and it only left Michael Myford with a free header which was expertly looped over the stranded 'Oz'.

Again though, we didn't crumble after that and it then became a real end-to-end game with Paul Woolston having a fiercely-struck long-range free-kick tipped over by Marcello Devizio, while at the other end 'Oz' made one or two more crucial saves, particularly in coming off his line to block close-range shots, although his best stop of the game was undoubtedly when he dived upwards from a prone position on the ground to tip away a deflection off the knee of Paul Woolston from Darren Rorie's shot after we had somehow survived a manic scramble in the area.

We then had a real setback in the 68th minute though when Tony Carter put Europa 4-3 up after our Club Linesman for the day (Manager Trevor Hughes of course !) had flagged for him being 'three yards offside' only to be over-ruled by Referee Doherty, who thought Trevor was flagging for another player who was clearly *not* offside ! However, Mr. Doherty gave us another penalty just two minutes later after another obvious foul on Derek Dorward, this time by defender Peter Szumski with a push in the back as Del tried to head in Steve Cokell's cross, but Stuart Dorward's spot kick (hit towards the same spot as his previous effort) was brilliantly saved by ex-Rover Devizio, who we all know is an expert at saving penalties. For some reason that resulted in 'Marchie' and Europa's Mario Culora (who has also played with Stuart in Saturday football ?) really winding him up with a load of verbals going on which probably would have resulted in some sort of 'ruck' if it was against certain *other* teams in the League. However they soon shut up when Steve Cokell whipped in the resulting corner for Paul Ellerker to make it 4-4 with a perfectly-timed near-post header that gave Devizio no chance (*See picture above right*) and it was then *our* players who were doing all the laughing...while Europa's players all argued (as usual). Meanwhile on the touchline next to the camera, I could hear comments from amused spectators saying 'What sort of a game *is* this ?', and even more so during the next 10 minutes when we really rode our luck as Referee Doherty failed to give Europa a penalty for a blatant handball by Andrew Warmerdam and Foysol Ahmed headed a fierce header from Bruno Amorelli off the line from a corner...amongst other escapes. (*See picture above left*).

We had our chances on the break as well though, but we did have to hang on a bit at the end because of our recent lack of match practice and we had to thank Ozel Ozerman for a man-of-the-match performance and Referee Doherty for playing only 41 minutes in the Second Half for some reason in order for us to scrape a point, which was of course against all the odds beforehand.

This was our fourth match in a row without defeat though, and with so many changes having to be made to our line-up for each match, it only goes to show just what we could have done this season if only we could field a settled side.

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: With the recent news that they may well lose their treasured home ground at Hazelwood, Rovers arrived at Albany Park for a glimpse of a windswept, faeces strewn future. For some such as Foysol Ahmed and your scribe it was more a case of back to the future for Albany was once the home of the now disbanded Reserves. It was hardly a fortress and, as I kicked away last night's dog's dinner, I mused on why it seems these deposits are so often made just within the white line. Ask yourself, how often do you have to dribble round Fido's fallout in the centre circle? It may seem the stuff of conspiracy but could it be masters actually nudge their canine charges on to the field of play when nature calls?

With the pitch cleared, the team lined up in the recently favoured 3-5-2 format after a last minute switch to 4-5-1 and back again. Manager Hughes' Mourinho-like tinkering resulted from 'keeper Simon Jackson doing a Zinga due to a last minute bout of 'flu. For a moment Derek Dorward was set to pick up the goalkeeping gauntlets but young Ozel Ozerman answered Manager Hughes' desperate last minute phone call. Oz is nearer in stature to Ronnie Corbett than his namesake Geordie bricklayer played by Jimmy Nail in Auf Wiedersehen Pet but this served merely as a smokescreen to the performance about to come. And while on the subject of nails, Juneka Junior's had mended sufficiently for him to return to the side. Missing, though, were Nick

Vertigans, Terry Moore and Conor McGovern which resulted in Foysol Ahmed being deployed as a makeshift striker alongside Steve Cokell.

Of those present, several were nursing some well earned hangovers and so it was perhaps not surprising that Rovers started slowly. Within 20 seconds they so nearly fell behind but for what was to become the first of a litany of spectacular stops by Oz. After 20 minutes, Rovers could well have been four or five down and it was again Oz they had to thank for keeping the deficit down to one matching skipper Stuart Dorward's pair of piss holes in the snow. But then came a pivotal moment. Derek Dorward was fouled not once but twice in the box and a penalty was awarded despite a quite depressing observation from a Europa defender. "If it was a foul, why didn't he go down?" he asked, no doubt spending the rest of the week bemoaning divers.

Stuart Dorward had by now sobered up enough to despatch the penalty and Rovers were back in it. And some. In the 33rd minute Wooly rose at the far post to head home the third of a trilogy of Steve Cokell corners and now it was Europa who were on the rack. With Rovers applying pressure all over the pitch, the home side began to doubt themselves and their erstwhile passing game broke down. This was personified by Rovers third when Foysol Ahmed was presented with an open goal after a defensive mistake forced by Derek Dorward. Incredibly, after the most ragged of opening periods, Rovers turned round 3-2 to the good. Indeed, the lead would have been greater had Juneka Junior's free kick not cannoned off the bar.

The Brazilian had had a chequered half, demonstrating some neat turns and distribution alongside delivering a master class in some more stereotypical South American reaction to fouls or free kicks awarded against. There was the dabbing of hand to mouth to check for non-existent blood, praying hands beseeching refereeing mercy and liberal lingering on the ground only to be resurrected by the arrival of the water bucket. The piece de resistance was to come later when he went down after conceding a free kick. Finding himself the wrong side of the ball, Junior got up, got goal side, and went down again. But, having said all that, he did suffer something more painful than a broken nail when his paternal enablers were crunched midway through the first half.

During the interval Manager Hughes reminded his charges how valuable these three points could prove and despatched them to defend the lead. This was easier said than done against the prevailing westerly and it was not long before Oz was called into further action. Hurling himself hither and thither, sometimes bravely at the feet of onrushing forwards, Oz could have been forgiven for thinking his pit would have been far a more comfortable proposition than this turkey shoot. However, he could do nothing about Europa's equaliser, a looping header which took advantage of his lack of inches.

At parity, the pressure grew on Rovers' goal and one goalmouth scramble took on almost comic proportions. A succession of 50/50s saw the ball bullied along the line but, despite the plethora of bodies and boots thrown, Europa simply could not force it home. Then, shortly after, Oz somehow flipped the ball over, seemingly swivelling in mid-air to react to a deflection off Wooly's thigh. It was a top drawer save and one would have to watch a lot of football at this level to see a better one. Perhaps the congratulations of the Europa forwards told the best story.

But when pressure builds a head of steam, it generally brings its rewards and, on 68 minutes, Europa controversially took the lead. The goal resulted from one of "those" offside decisions and, as is common practice this season, referee Kevin Doherty was calling these. Europa's eventual scorer was in an offside position when the ball was played through but, as he ran from behind the referee, Mr Doherty was unsighted and dismissed Manager Hughes' frantic flagging thinking he was signalling Europa's other forward who was in the middle and onside. With this being the case, Mr Doherty felt confident in his overrule and saw no reason to consult the still windmilling Manager Hughes. The referee's assistant's assistance being left unsought, the goal stood.

Manager Hughes was distinctly unhappy and, a few minutes, later a couple of coppers turned up on the touchline. Surely he didn't?

Having fallen behind in such circumstances, Rovers could well have buckled but instead they rallied and almost immediately gained a second penalty. In truth it should have been a third – an earlier, comfortably inside the box claim was somehow given as a comfortably outside the box free kick. Skipper Dorward again took responsibility but, this time, ex-Rovers 'keeper Marcello Devizio guessed right and made the save. But Europa's backslapping and celebration proved short-lived. From the resulting corner, again supremely delivered by Steve Cokell, Paul Ellerker headed in at the near post.

The final 20 minutes ebbed and flowed with neither side able to grab the points. Europa came closest but were denied from a corner when Foysol Ahmed did his job at the far post to head a goal bound effort against the bar and over. At the final whistle the honours were even in a 4-4 draw and the differing reactions to the result spoke volumes. While Europa harangued the ref all the way back to the changing rooms, Rovers applauded Oz in. How fitting. How deserved.

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