

Sunday 17th July 2005

Risden Wood Pre-Season Tournament (Group D) Match at the Metropolitan Police Sports Ground, Chigwell

EDMONTON ROVERS	2	EUROPA	4	HT 1-1
<i>S.Cokell (5 mins.), Vertigans (Pen.) (78 mins.)</i>		<i>Culora (17 mins.), Myford (48, 87, 89 mins.)</i>		

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (6); Colin BESTER (6½), Tony SPELLER (6), Paul WOOLSTON (6½), Chris AKINRELE (7); Eric IBEKWEM (6½), Stuart DORWARD (7), Nick VERTIGANS (7), John BEASLEY (7); Ant ROBERTS (7), Steve COKELL (6½)
Subs.: Tem ADIL (6½), Gary COKELL (6½)

EUROPA'S LINE-UP: Marcello DEVIZIO; Mario CULORA, Carlo CASALI, Vince RODIA, Andy Mc,KAY; Kyrie KYRIAKIDES, Darren RORIE, Mike TOGWELL, Tony CARTER; Michael MYFORD, Paolo NIGRO
Subs Used: Bruno AMORELLI, Giulio SANTANGELO, Gary BRACE

Referee: Trevor HUGHES !

Weather Conditions: Very Hot & Sunny

Attendance: 15



Report (by Laurence Hughes): We decided to enter this possible six-week long Tournament this year due to a number of prospective players for the forthcoming season not having been able to play in the 7-a-side League so far this Summer. With the Tournament rules allowing a maximum of seven substitutes to be used, we therefore named a squad of 18 as we knew the weather was going to be 'blisteringly hot' and they would all probably be needed, but of course when it came to the crunch (i.e. the morning of the match), we ended up with just two substitutes and no less than seven first-choice First Team players being unavailable. We already knew that key players such as Conor Mc,Govern (On Holiday), Derek Dorward (Working), Robin Pryke (Injured), Terry Moore (Work Golf

Day), Chris 'Nugget' Beeden (Visiting his brother Russell in Manchester) and Andrew Warmerdam (Family Commitments) would not be playing, but when Paul Ellerker dropped out at short notice because his dog had been kidnapped and Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo was unable to travel by train from Erith in Kent on the morning of the match because they were not running (yet again !), this time because of a bomb scare at Canary Wharf, it was really frustrating that here we were having to 'scrape up' a team at the last minute again (as happened so often last season, causing both of our teams to suffer relegation). We also had Reserve Team players Foyso Ahmed, Chris Morrish and Myron Mc,Kay drop out, Morrish because he had 'had a bad night' (although he did get changed to come on as a substitute if needed), while Mc,Kay was apparently playing for another club in the Tournament at another one of the venues...this as a result of him becoming the latest player (after the recently-departed Kevin Dedman and Lee Osborn) to become disillusioned with the Reserve Team's performances last season. (Myron wasn't sure of the name of the team who had asked him to play for them, but it looks as if it is our Division Four rivals from last season, Dysons Rovers !)

As usual when we have numerous key players missing, our opponents turned up with what appeared to be a full-strength side, while they were also at the venue an hour before kick-off to do lengthy pre-match team-talks and proper warm-ups out on the pitch. In fact the officially-appointed referee, Bob Martin, was also at the venue early as he was waiting just inside the entrance when we drove in 40 minutes before the designated 10.30.a.m. kick-off. However, once we had queued up for a changing room and finally found out which pitch we were on (at about 10.40.a.m. !?) there was no sign of Mr. Martin and it appeared he had got lost somewhere amidst the vast (and very impressive) facilities of the Met Police Sports Ground. Fortunately, Europa Secretary Ray Lugg had a Mercury Waltham League handbook with him with Mr. Martin's mobile



number in it, but when he answered, it turned out that he was back at home in Enfield because he had asked two of the other teams at the venue if he was at the right place and they told him 'no' because they had 'never heard' of Edmonton Rovers or Europa ! He was also 'annoyed' that the Tournament organiser(s) had not approached him when he arrived (as happens in the Mercury Waltham Sunday League) and therefore decided to go home at 10.00.a.m....as if he thought that was the scheduled kick-off time and we had not turned up for it ! (Of course we were all just arriving at that time and Europa were all in a different car park to where Mr. Martin was waiting !).

It seemed very strange that a referee would be so impatient when he was due to earn himself another £25.00, but with Europa including three of our former players in their line-up in Darren Rorie, Carlo Casali and goalkeeper Marcello Devizio, they had no problems with Trevor Hughes refereeing instead, even though they realised he was not fit enough to move out of the centre-circle and had no linesmen's flags with him. Of course that was even more bad news for us as 'bang went our Manager', on top of all the players we were missing !

With Europa finishing in mid-table in Division One of the Mercury Waltham Sunday League last season then and obviously being a half-decent side, it didn't look too good for us as we waited for the kick-off. However, once the game got under way, we actually played some excellent sharp one and two-touch football and dominated the first 15 minutes or so with Steve Cokell putting us 1-0 up after just five minutes with a first time shot from close range from John Beasley's low cross, while debutants Chris Akinrele, Nick Vertigans and Ant Roberts all fitted in straight away and looked very impressive, especially Akinrele at left-back, even though he was being forced to play in that position because of the absence of others. With virtually all of our starting line-up having kept themselves fit playing in the 7-a-side League on a fairly regular basis for the past two months, it looked as if that was clearly a telling factor, but then Europa suddenly managed to equalise in the 17th minute from their first chance of the match as 'referee' Trevor Hughes failed to spot Chris Akinrele running the ball out for a throw-in, and then when Akinrele sliced an attempted cross from that straight to a Europa midfielder, Hughes was still not up with play enough to give an 'obvious' offside decision against Mario Culora when the ball was played through, leaving Culora to easily lob Darryl Johnson in a one-on-one. *(Video evidence actually shows Colin Bester playing Culora onside anyway, so it was therefore sweeper Tony Speller's fault for trying to play offside without a linesman and with the 'referee' standing 'half a mile away' !)*

That goal really changed the pattern of the match as Europa's heads went up, while we seemed to be in 7-a-side League mode and waiting for the usual 'roll-on, roll-off' substitutions to be made, which was not allowed in this Tournament, thereby causing Stuart Dorward a problem as he had to carry his asthma inhaler about with him on the pitch for the rest of the match...which a 'proper' referee probably wouldn't have allowed !?

In fact we never really got going again after that and the rest of the game was very even with both sides having the occasional chance, but without either goalkeeper being really extended and without much quality football being played, even though the fitness levels of both sides were quite good considering the sweltering conditions with not a cloud in the sky. That saw the teams come off level at Half-Time, but Europa went 2-1 up just three minutes after the break when Darren Rorie played a good ball with backspin over our defence for Michael Myford to run onto and lob Darryl Johnson again in another one-on-one. We then had a couple of other escapes from similar situations...which always seem to happen when we play Tony Speller as sweeper, and it was definitely not a good idea for him to be trying to save his energy in the heat by continuing to play the offside trap without linesmen. Indeed when we started making substitutions midway through the Second Half with Tem Adil and Gary Cokell coming on for the presumably sunburnt Colin Bester and the tiring Ant Roberts while changing to a 4-5-1 formation, it gave us more of a chance of getting back into the match, although it needed a needless and obvious push in the back on Stuart Dorward by Europa substitute Bruno Amorelli in the 78th minute to give us a lifeline as Nick Vertigans sent Marcello Devizio the wrong way from the penalty spot to make it 2-

2.

At that stage it looked as if a draw was the most likely result as both teams had been very evenly matched, particularly in the Second Half, but then Europa forward Michael Myford completed his hat-trick with two goals 'out of the blue' in the last three minutes to give them a rather flattering 4-2 victory, both of these coming from well-struck shots from just outside the area which gave Darryl Johnson little chance, but which may well have been prevented by Paul Ellerker getting in a challenge from a midfield holding position had he been playing. In fact that may also have stopped the through balls being played for Europa's first two goals as well, and Ellerker's absence certainly looked to be crucial, as did that of last season's top scorer Conor McGovern and last season's Player Of The Year Derek Dorward.

Although there was no 'major inquest' on the final whistle and we can look on this match as a good workout for those who were able to take part, it was still frustrating that once again we just cannot get a full-strength or settled side out, unlike other teams seem able to do...even at this time of the year.

With the favourites for the Group, Ridsden Wood's First Team, winning their opening game 7-1 and the forthcoming results being quite predictable, it looks as if it could well turn out that we will win our other two matches but go out of the Tournament on goal difference because of this result, and this really was a match that we needed to win. However, our fixtures against Europa in Division One of the Mercury Waltham Sunday League this season will be more important, and if that was their full-strength side they were fielding in this match against only 'half our First Team', then we have every right to feel quite confident about the season ahead, especially if the likes of Chris Akinrele, Nick Vertigans and Ant Roberts sign registration forms sooner rather than later.

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