

Sunday 21st November 2004

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division Four Match at Albany Park

<b>EDMONTON ROVERS RESERVES</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>FLAMSTEAD END</b>	<b>3</b>	HT 0-2
<i>Murphy (Pen.) (76 mins.)</i>		<i>Martin Covall (1 min.), Grant Drabwell (29 mins.), Dave Kenney (75 mins.)</i>		

**EDMONTON ROVERS RESERVES' LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10):** Dave BAGNALL (GK) (7); Lee OSBORN (6½), Tony SPELLER (7), Ritchie COPUES (6½), Scott ROBERTSON (6); Gary ODELL (7), Nick ALEXANDER (6½), Tem ADIL (6), Peter MURPHY (7); Russell BEEDEN (6½), Myron Mc,KAY (8) **Subs.:** Colin BESTER (7), Billy BURNHAM (6½), Thomas DELL (Not Used), Mark HOWLEY (Not Used)

**FLAMSTEAD END'S LINE-UP:** No Team Details

**Referee:** Adam TACKLEY      **Weather Conditions:** Drizzle. No Wind      **Attendance:** ?

**Report (By Peter Murphy):** Buoyed by an upturn in recent form, Rovers returned to Albany determined to make their home ground a fortress. Having proved to themselves that they could give anyone a game at this level, they now know the dividing line between defeat and victory is fine and eminently surmountable. It will be at the margins that they will find that little extra to bridge the gap. Margins such as pre-match preparation.

To that end, a quick pan round the dressing room revealed midfielder Nick Alexander relaxing in a windswept corner. Bobble-hatted against the cold, the woodbine resting casually between his lips signalled he'd fully recovered from last week's throat injury. At this point Manager Howley intervened to pluck said contraband from Alexander's mouth and, leading by example, he took a long, hard draw before placing it affectionately whence it came.

Moving forty five degrees to Alexander's left a sedentary Tarby suddenly belted himself in the mouth. No, this wasn't Rovers' centre-forward taking a tip in pre-match hype from the England Rugby team, more the result of a firm tug on his boot lace. He really should take them out of his kit bag in between games.

As a hasty rewiring ensued, kick-off was fast approaching. Unlike Myron McKay. Not unusually, a last minute phone call had doubled up as his early morning alarm call. Fortunately he made it but only thanks to referee Adam Tackley ordering some remedial work on the nets as part of his own fastidious pre-match preparations. Mr Tackley also ensured all and sundry had their bling removed or taped up though he seemed strangely benign at the copious amounts of dogs\*\*t that reassuringly dotted Albany's lush and slightly overgrown turf.

With the game finally underway Rovers new found determination lasted precisely 60 seconds. A ball over the top caught Lee Osborn in two minds. Perhaps his thoughts were still being dominated by a warm-up that had included a lengthy session testing out the Albany porcelain as he purged last night's curry but he neither attacked the ball nor did he take a few steps back. Instead, rooted to the spot he made like a Falklands penguin who, it is said, fall helplessly on their backs as they track the RAF helicopters flying overhead. The result saw Flamstead End's Martin Covall in behind and he opened up his body to place a decent shot past Dave Bagnall. Faced with such an early setback it would have been easy for Rovers' to crumble. But these days they are made of sterner stuff and slowly but surely played their way back into the game. However, they were unable to penetrate the Flamstead defence and, on 29 minutes, it was the visitors who doubled their lead with a Grant Drabwell header from a corner.

The only other chance of note before half-time fell to Rovers. A neat build-up released Gary Odell down the right whose deep cross found Murf at the far post but his header was beaten out by the keeper.

Manager Howley used the break to introduce Colin Bester for Tem Adil. The substitution allowed Tony Speller to move into central midfield with Lee Osborn replacing him as sweeper. The requirement was an early goal and, after a good move involving McKay and Tarby, Alexander spurned a gilt-edged chance from the resulting corner. Pulling cleverly off his man, all his header needed was a firm touch, a touch Alexander proved unable to apply. His oblique header sailed harmlessly wide to his acute frustration.

The game then settled into a pattern of end to end football with Rovers more than holding their own. On 65 minutes Odell shot narrowly wide before Myron McKay succumbed to a knee injury. As he hobbled off Messrs Dell & Burnham both sauntered on. Not so fast young Dell. McKay had

played well but not that well. As Dell re-donned his track top, Burnham took up the right back position after the briefest of sojourns up front. Burnham was returning to action after a self-imposed exile in order to improve his fitness and he certainly looked different for it. His hair is definitely shorter.

The 75th minute saw Osborn do what Osborn does best. Berating Scott Robertson, whose finding of touch achieved a consistency worthy of Jonny Wilkinson and was only eclipsed by his finding of his winger's knee, and Ritchie Copues to "stop talking to each other, you're not concentrating", he could have been applying for a part in Look Who's Talking. For, as the very words emanated the Osborn orifice, Flamstead's Kenney nutmegged the imprudent Rover and slotted a shot past the exposed Bagnall. You couldn't make it up. You really couldn't.

Rovers' response saw Tony Speller's surging run stopped illegally in its tracks and the resultant spot kick was despatched by Murf for 3-1. There was still 14 minutes left but, despite great effort, Rovers simply could not find a second.

And so it proved both a frustrating and encouraging morning. Rovers have turned a corner, stemming the avalanche of goals for which Dave Bagnall should take great credit, and are now competitive. Yet they are still to take the lead in any game and that first win remains elusive.

The foundation stone of Fortress Albany will have to be laid another week.