

Sunday 25th January 2004

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Premier Division) Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS

4

LEA VALLEY ROYALS

4

HT 0-0 !

Mc,Govern (60 mins.),
S.Cokell (67 mins.),
Sutton (72 mins.),
D.Dorward (82 mins.)

Bruno (50, 68, 75, 81 mins.)

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Simon JACKSON (GK) (6); Chidi IBEKWEM (6), Tony SPELLER (6), Paul WOOLSTON (6½), Steve BEASLEY (6); Derek DORWARD (6½), Paul ELLERKER (6½), Marco ELLERKER (6½), Peter SUTTON (7); Conor Mc,GOVERN (7), Steve COKELL (7) **Subs.:** Gary COKELL (6), Eric IBEKWEM (6)

Lea Valley Royals Line-Up: Gary ELLIS (GK); Danny BEECH, Gary MURTON, John TURONE, Nick SHARP; Steve HARRISON, Pell ALFIERI, Darren BEECH, Gary THOMAS; Tony BRUNO, Adrian DEVINE **Subs.:** None

Referee: Neil MORRIS

Weather Conditions: Sunny & Warm !

Attendance: 10



Report: When it rained heavily on the Friday night before this match, it appeared that we were heading for yet another postponement bearing in mind the 'over-protection' that is normally given to our home pitch at Hazelwood by Enfield Council's groundsmen. However, as it turned out, the pitch was in surprisingly good condition considering the time of year, while the weather conditions were perfect for football with no wind whatsoever...although the low sun was difficult to defend against as we kicked towards the kids' pitch in the First Half (as usual). Despite us fielding a full-strength midfield and forward line-up though, we were once again without three key defenders in Robin Pryke (Neck Injury), Stuart Dorward (Honeymoon) and John Beasley (Other Commitments), so we did well to reach Half-Time without conceding a goal and without Simon Jackson having to make any saves where he had to extend himself. However, fellow mid-table side Lea Valley Royals

were fielding a very depleted team with just the bare eleven, including two Reserve Team players who normally play in Division Six and their 42-year-old Manager Tony Bruno, so we really should have taken advantage of that. However, we were really 'rusty' early on, having only played once in the last seven weeks *before* this match, and with Lea Valley Royals having played virtually every week in that time and also fielding numerous players from Saturday football, they were much sharper than us and we were therefore forced to defend deep most of the time and just hope for the best. That saw them throw virtually all their players up into attack, while trying pot-shots from outside the area, most of which went straight at Simon Jackson or way over the bar, but we certainly had a lucky escape half-way through the half when midfielder Pell Alfieri somehow managed to half-volley a cross over the bar at the far post from one yard out when it was easier to score. Because Lea Valley Royals were attacking so much though, that was always going to result in us having chances as well, although most of them in the First Half actually came from set-pieces taken by Marco Ellerker, one of which found the head of a diving Paul Woolston at the far post (after about 30 minutes) but keeper Gary Ellis looked highly useful in keeping that effort out, while he also made another couple of excellent saves shortly afterwards, most notably from Conor Mc,Govern when he looked certain to score. With Lea Valley Royals missing various players of apparent quality from Senior Saturday football such as Billy Luscombe, Rob Sharp (a regular for St. Margaretsbury) and Gerard Prenderville (our own Chris 'Nugget' Beeden's team-mate from Broxbourne Borough), we thought maybe they might pose less of a threat as the game went on, but as we did in our last match against F.C. Boca Hill, we failed to raise the tempo as we came out for the Second Half and found ourselves going a goal behind five minutes later when Tony Bruno swept the ball in from close range from a right wing cross after a quick sharp move had caught our defenders sleeping...despite the biggest culprit for that in the First Half (Steve Beasley) having substituted himself at Half-Time because he had been 'letting the lads down'. (Presumably Beasley had been to a party the night before as he turned up late and unshaven ?!).

We then had to make another alteration to our defence just seven minutes later though when Chidi Ibekwem limped off with what appeared to be a knock which maybe he could have run off, but everybody's heads were a bit down at that stage and if we were allowed eleven substitutes then most of our players probably would have jumped at the chance of coming off before they could make any more mistakes. That saw the full-back positions now being filled by Gary Cokell (who had replaced Beasley at Half-Time) and Eric Ibekwem (who then came on to replace his brother Chidi, having been left out of the starting line-up initially in order for Trevor Hughes to accommodate the now fit-again Peter Sutton).

We really needed some inspiration in front of goal at that stage though, and fortunately Conor Mc,Govern suddenly decided to come up with one of his spectacular overhead kick specials in the 60th minute to equalise against the run of play, although there was some doubt as to whether it should be credited to Mc,Govern as some of our players claimed the ball had hit the bar first then rebounded in off the back of a defenders' head on the goal-line, which of course is technically an Own Goal ! (Video evidence has subsequently proved that they were winding him up though, as the initial shot was on target and therefore officially Mc,Govern's goal).

That goal really gave us a boost though and we then had a really good spell which ended with us going into a 2-1 lead in the

67th minute as Steve Cokell headed in on the goal-line after Peter Sutton's shot from an acute angle had rebounded to him off the inside of the post. The move for that goal was started by Paul Woolston with an excellent through ball, but Wooly was then at fault (according to Manager/Linesman Trevor Hughes) when we let in a really bad goal just 10 seconds after the re-start as Tony Bruno notched his second of the match from midfielder Steve Harrison's through ball, with Wooly and sweeper Tony Speller getting in a complete muddle with an attempted offside trap.

Thankfully though, Lea Valley Royals were equally as dodgy in defence and we regained the lead in the 72nd minute when Peter Sutton fired in a low left-footed shot under the body of keeper Ellis after finding himself in acres of space on the left from Conor McGovern's headed flick-on. However, we then went and let in two more bad goals in the space of six minutes to find ourselves going 4-3 down, both of them being almost identical in that all four of our defenders couldn't decide between them whether to step up and play the offside trap or not from through balls aimed towards 42-year-old Tony Bruno for fear of him out-sprinting them...which he ended up doing anyway to claim all four of Lea Valley Royals goals in the end and basically make us look a laughing stock defensively ! (Yes, their players were actually rolling around laughing in disbelief that their 'retired' Manager can do that sort of thing to a team with a supposed reputation of being sound defensively...or at least we were *last* season when we were playing a 4-5-1 system, and maybe we should go back to that until all our players are fit enough to play with just four in midfield ?).

Thankfully though, we had enough firepower up front in this match to salvage a point through Derek Dorward's 82nd minute diving header (after an excellent cross by Steve Cokell) and indeed we created a number of other good chances in the Second Half...although so did Lea Valley Royals in a game which could easily have ended up as an 8-8 draw !

Great entertainment for any neutrals watching then, especially Referee Neil Morris who said he thoroughly enjoyed the game, but from our point of view it confirmed that we need Robin, Stuart & 'Junior' back to shore up our defence as soon as possible before we slip into the relegation places.