

Sunday 30th October 2005

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Enfield Playing Fields (Pitch 17)

LONDON AJAX

3 EDMONTON ROVERS

0

HT 1-0

Bullock (36 mins.),
T.Brown (84, 90 mins.)

LONDON AJAX'S LINE-UP: Bobby SMITH, Dan THURSTON, Dan HOWARD, Marc BUSH, Chris NELSON, Aaron BULLOCK, Mark NELSON, Rob BROWN, Terry BROWN, Gerard PRENDERVILLE, Danny SMITH **Subs.:** Danny HAWKENS, Lee CHAN

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (6½); Tony SPELLER (6½), Stuart DORWARD (7), Robin PRYKE (6½), Terry MOORE (7); Derek DORWARD (6), John Mc,LOUGHLIN (6½), Nick VERTIGANS (6), Peter MURPHY (6½); Conor Mc,GOVERN (6), Steve COKELL (6) **Subs.:** Vernon 'Kizza' NXUMALO (6), Colin BESTER (6)

Referee: Kevin DOHERTY

Weather Conditions: Warm, but Very
Windy

Attendance: 19



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

This was our first-ever meeting with London Ajax, a side who share some similarities with us in that they started off in the Edmonton Sunday League and are also sponsored by On Broadway and drink down there after matches on Sundays. Despite that, most of their players were a bit of an unknown quantity to us, and as it turned out they rather caught us out a bit in this match ! Although first-choice players Paul Woolston and Paul Ellerker were missing due to family & social commitments and new signing Andrew Warmerdam had to miss out after going down with flu, we still fielded a starting line-up of eleven good experienced players plus a couple of promising youngsters 'on the bench' and

were fully expecting to win following our last two excellent performances (and clean sheets)

against Wormley Rovers and Metrolina Uniques. That optimism was also based on London Ajax losing 3-0 to I.M.L. Red Cow in their previous match and having lost 6-1 to Europa back in

September, but as soon as Referee Kevin Doherty blew his whistle to start the match, London Ajax came flying out of the traps and put us under pressure for virtually the full 90 minutes with their competitiveness and they just didn't allow us to settle and play our normal passing game.

Indeed our defenders had to make at least three desperate last-ditch challenges in the first five minutes to get themselves out of trouble in their own area after London Ajax had caught us out with first-time through balls and lightning-quick movement by their forwards, but we managed to get a grip on that defensively thereafter and most of the First Half was a bit of a stalemate with both sides cancelling each other out with defences well on top and both goalkeepers

only having the occasional dangerous cross to deal with rather than any full-blooded on-target shots.

However, we suddenly found ourselves a goal behind in the 36th minute when a corner was



whipped in for ex-Brimsdown Rovers defender Aaron Bullock to head in at the far post, this appearing to be the fault of

new signing John Mc,Loughlin, who was obviously not used to our zonal marking system and called for the ball when it was in the 'zone' for other defenders to clear more comfortably.

Even then, we knew we would really be up against it in trying to get back into the

match as too many of our players just didn't look sharp enough to get behind the London Ajax defence, even though we did have spells where our build-up play looked quite promising. Manager Trevor Hughes therefore decided to bring 18-year-old Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo on for the start of the Second Half with 41-year-old Peter Murphy volunteering to come off due to a 'damaged coccyx' (i.e. the sort of injury you might receive if you have just had a kick up the arse...which is probably what most of our players needed anyway !). That did make us a little more lively going forward, but still not enough to create a single worthwhile chance...until we made a further substitution in the 74th minute with Colin Bester coming on to play at right-back, Tony Speller moving to sweeper and Stuart Dorward joining Nick Vertigans as an extra attacking midfielder (with holding player John Mc,Loughlin sacrificed). Not surprisingly, that change immediately made an impact and we created two or three clear-cut chances at last with London Ajax keeper Bobby Smith making some useful saves, particularly from Derek Dorward, and it looked as if our opponents were finally beginning to tire.

However, they then went and killed the game off in the 84th minute when Colin Bester was caught in possession by Danny Smith and the ball was squared across to Terry Brown, who produced a good finish from close range with us outnumbered at the back.

As usual when facing a certain defeat, we then went and threw even more players forward and ended up conceding an inevitable third goal in the last minute when Brown scored his second and London Ajax's third after finding himself clean through from Gerard Prenderville's first-time through ball, this apparently being the fault of Colin Bester (again) for trying to play Brown offside instead of using his pace and fitness to chase after him (something which Colin is actually very good at doing) while Darryl Johnson was also 'slow off his line'.

A 3-0 victory rather flattered London Ajax in the end, but they certainly deserved to win and will definitely finish in the top half of the table if they play like that (and field the same line-up) for the rest of the season.

However, there were quite a number of reasons why we were not at our best. Firstly, three of our midfield quartet in this match were new players to the club (or new to the First Team in Peter Murphy's case), whereas in recent matches we have had Paul Ellerker and Tony Speller in there (i.e. players who are used to our system and style of play). This meant that although we played well defensively, the link-up between midfield and attack wasn't sharp enough.

Secondly, we did not have a game the week before, and that seemed to affect our momentum (and general fitness ?), having gained two good wins in a row *before* that, and thirdly, when do we ever play well over Enfield Playing Fields when there is a gale-force wind blowing...as it was for this match ?

It was also unfortunate that we should put on such a lethargic performance when we had a large crowd of 'supporters' turn up to 'cheer us on' (or rather talk about Spurs v. Arsenal (or babies ?) on the touchline instead ?!). However, we weren't exactly 'outclassed', and if our current squad sticks together (as it should), then we should win more games than we lose in this Division this season.

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: The latest chapter in Rovers revival season saw the jades travel to the multitudinous mosaic of pitches that form Enfield Playing Fields. Here the changing rooms are compact, the showers lukewarm and the toilets unflushable if my rather unpleasant experience is anything to go by. On the plus side there is a whole range of cholesterol boosting

pre-match fare to be had at the roach coach parked adjacent to the changing block. Who said Sunday morning footballers' bodies are not temples?

Despite the clocks going back an hour brothers Dorward still managed to arrive late, the Del variety without a full complement of football boots. It was not a good omen though the temptation was to encourage him to hop to it. Fortunately a pair was hurled in his direction and, by kick-off, Rovers had a fully shod eleven to take the pitch. With one or two absentees the major change to the side saw John Mc,Loughlin make his full debut alongside the returning Nick Vertigans in central midfield. Also returning was Mrs Bester, her presence signifying the return to the squad of son, Colin. Our most ardent spectator took up residence on the water bottle box, this being an away game. You only get the luxury camp seat at home games.

The referee, Kevin Doherty, who is becoming almost as regular a fixture as Colin's mum, this being his 3rd Rovers' game of the season, commenced the proceedings at what Trevor Hughes reliably informs me as 10.29am. But despite the early kick-off, a difficult wind and bobbly pitch, both sides attempted to play football wherever possible. However, the conditions mitigated against and soon both sides realised there was a premium to be had from the long ball, often from the boot of the respective 'keepers. This was further reinforced by a near stalemate in midfield with few real chances being created by either side.

It was therefore inevitable that a set play would be the most likely producer of a goal and that's how it proved, Ajax going in to the break one up thanks to a far post header from a corner. In truth it was possibly the only well delivered corner from several Ajax accumulated, the rest being skewed all over the show, but it took full advantage of the swirling wind to invite an attacking header no more than a yard off the line. It was one of those where the defending players couldn't really get off the ground to meet the leap of an onrushing opponent.

At half-time your scribe fell on his sword after previously falling on his coccyx, in the process aggravating an injury sustained from running into a lamp post on a recent trip to Zurich. With Kizza coming on in my stead, Manager Hughes was hopeful of a more attacking dimension to Rovers' second half. It was also apparent from the half-time inquest that the team felt they'd been off the pace and so reminders were issued to be first and get stuck in.

The 2nd period took up where the first left off, all very tight and with little to trouble either goalkeeper. Finally, with the battle at an impasse but Rovers behind, Manager Hughes threw his dice. He took off John Mc,Loughlin for young Bester and re-jigged his forces to accommodate the energetic Stuart Dorward in central midfield. Sadly, it came up more snake eyes than double six.

As Rovers tried to push for the equaliser holes were left at the back, holes that were made worse by Robin Pryke sustaining an ankle injury. In recent times this would not have been a problem, the subs' bench resembling something like the crowd scene from Ben Hur, but today there were only two extras in Rovers' supporting cast and they were both now centre stage. Thus Robin Pryke and later Derek Dorward (calf) had to limp through till the final curtain.

In the final 6 minutes Ajax added two more goals to embellish the score line. The first came after Colin Bester was dispossessed and the second courtesy of a long ball which Ajax's No.10 gathered in a wide position before turning neatly to despatch a crisp shot into the far corner.

Three-nil was a little harsh on Rovers but the consensus was we got what we deserved for an insipid performance. A couple of Vertigans' haymakers aside, there was hardly a Rovers shot to trouble the statisticians and the only bright spot of the day were the luminous orange workmen's kit of Lee Osborn's new side throbbing on the horizon.

So, with the clocks going back, the British summer is officially over. The leaves on the ground signify that Fall is here. Let's make sure Rovers don't go the same way.

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!