

Sunday 15th January 2006

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Enfield Playing Fields (Pitch 16)

METROLINE UNIQUES

4

EDMONTON ROVERS

2

HT 3-1

Burnett (2 mins.),
Fleming (24, 43 mins.),
Joseph (54 mins.)

Vertigans (3, 69 (Pen.) mins.)

METROLINE UNIQUES LINE-UP: Michael NEOFIT (GK); Obi UZO, Kevin ANTOINE, Adolphus WHITE, Dave THOMAS; Adrian HERBAN, Carlton FLEMING, Joel BURNETT, Andy SIVI; Tyrone PALMER, Raphael JOSEPH **Subs.:** Daniel LOUIS, Delroy PHILOGENE

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Gary COKELL (GK) (6½); Colin BESTER (6), Andrew WARMERDAM (6), Paul WOOLSTON (6), Terry MOORE (6½); Nick VERTIGANS (7½), John McLOUGHLIN (6½), Stuart DORWARD (7½), Peter MURPHY (6½); Conor McGOVERN (6), Derek DORWARD (7) **Subs.:** Kris SPYROU (6½), JUNEKA JUNIOR (6½)

Referee: Paul HERLIHY

Weather Conditions: Cloudy & Overcast

Attendance: 12



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

Despite our 'shattering' last-kick-of-the-match defeat the week before, we still had plenty of players willing to play in this match initially, even though our season had now effectively been ended in terms of trophy-winning possibilities. When the squad was named after training during the week, we only had Robin Pryke and long-term injury victim Darryl Johnson unavailable, so we therefore decided to leave the likes of Juneka Junior, Dan George, Kris Spyrou and Ritchie Copues out of the 16 as it was unfair to keep asking them to act as unused (or little-used) substitutes week-in, week-out. However, as usual, players

soon started dropping out with late excuses (and you can make your own minds up whether they are 'suspicious' or not !?). First to pull out was Tony Speller, whose physio told him his torn thigh muscle still needed another three weeks' rest, then Steve Cokell dropped out because of work commitments, and 'keeper Simon Jackson put a message on the Forum for the second week running stating that he would also have to drop out. It had already emerged that 'Jacko's' reason for missing the previous week's match was because he was 'knackered from doing a 14-mile run' during the week, and this time he managed to pick up a calf strain from whatever he does on Thursday nights ! That left us with outfield player Gary Cokell having to go in goal again, but there was still more to come in terms of cry-offs. That was even after we attempted to get Foyso Ahmed to come along to replace Speller and Steve Cokell, Foyso having not been named in the squad originally because he was not at training. As he used to do on many an occasion for the Reserves though, Foyso just didn't think he would be needed and had therefore already arranged to work instead...not being on the Internet the main reason for that, and then when Paul Ellerker dropped out at 10.00.p.m. on Saturday night because his missus had taken the car for the weekend to visit relatives up North (he lives in Hitchin, so therefore couldn't exactly cadge a lift off someone !), we had no choice but to call up the four 'regular substitutes' who had originally been left out...and it was a good job we did, as Chris 'Nugget' Beeden texted Manager Trevor Hughes at 10.00.a.m. on the morning of the match to say 'I don't think I'll make it this morning'...having already admitted to Trevor during the week that he was currently in the middle of a phase of 'having trouble getting out of bed on Sunday mornings at the moment' ! On this occasion, that was because of an all-day drinking session the day before after watching Liverpool v. Spurs (on Norwegian TV ahem...'somewhere' ?), something which also accounted for Ritchie Copues turning up with a minute to go and Russell Beeden turning up as Assistant Manager with a severe hangover. (Whatever happened to him 'giving up drinking' ?).



Dan George also didn't appear to get the message that he was needed, but thankfully Kris Spyrou and Juneke Junior managed to find out and turn up just after the kick-off to be named as our only substitutes. We still had a reasonable-enough starting line-up though with Terry Moore, John Mc,Loughlin and Derek Dorward all returning after missing the previous week's match, while Manager Hughes decided to revert back to our normal 4-4-2 formation with Stuart Dorward and Peter Murphy both back in their central and left-sided midfield roles respectively.

However, despite Metroline Uniques having only won once in the League all season and like ourselves, out of all three Cup competitions with nothing much to play for, they still managed to take the lead after just two minutes when stand-in keeper Gary Cokell made a real howler when he slid out to dive on a through ball which was just harmlessly trickling towards him, but it came off his knee straight to the feet of Uniques midfielder Joel Burnett, who tapped into an empty net with some of our players (and Manager Hughes) not even looking because they expected it to be such a routine piece of goalkeeping ! (See picture above right !)

Admittedly, the ball maybe did take a bit of a bobble, and with the pitch very heavy with long grass and piles of freshly-laid Great Dane's dogshit all over it, that was a rather ominous sign that the playing surface was one we would continue to make mistakes on and that this might be yet another one of our regular 'nightmare' performances at this particular venue. Fortunately though, just a minute later, Uniques keeper Michael Neofit made an equally bad mistake when he totally misjudged Derek Dorward's chip into the area and left Nick Vertigans with an easy tap-in this time.

With only three minutes gone, and both sides having conceded dodgy goals already, the few supporters we had on the touchline were already starting to mention possible 'crazy' scorelines, and with Referee Paul Herlihy deciding that he was going to make decisions on offsides himself from the Half-Way line instead of using Club Linesmen for that purpose, it wasn't surprising that both sides ended up having clear-cut chances galore, with at least half of them probably involving players who indeed *were* offside themselves, or at least interfering with play. This of course is the way that games are refereed in the Southern Amateur League and the Amateur Football Combination ('Old Boys' League) on Saturdays, so Conor Mc,Govern and Terry Moore were used to it, having both played in those Leagues, but our central defenders Paul Woolston and Andrew Warmerdam certainly were not, and it caused them major problems throughout as they tried to step up and play Uniques' much quicker forwards offside.

However, it was from Referee Hurlihy missing an obvious foul on John Mc,Loughlin in midfield that Metroline Uniques regained the lead in the 24th minute when a 'dumbfounded' Stuart Dorward 'just stood there' wondering why the whistle had not been blown, leaving Carlton Fleming to run through totally unchallenged to easily slide the ball past Gary Cokell...and through an annoying hole in the net which made it look like a kickabout match. (Presumably somebody had nicked all Uniques' net pegs as nothing seemed to be fastened down with their first goal going straight through the net as well !).

Although we had plenty of chances to equalise again in the First Half with our forwards and attacking midfielders all getting past the Uniques' defence very easily and often testing keeper Neofit to varying degrees of difficulty, Uniques did the same to us, with Gary Cokell gradually starting to redeem himself, but they managed to go 3-1 up in the 43rd minute when Paul Woolston was badly outpaced by dangerman Carlton Fleming, who blasted a fierce drive inside Cokell's near post from just inside the area, with the ball this time hitting the net and bouncing out as if it was hitting a brick wall. What sort of strange goalnets were they using !?

We came off at Half-Time 3-1 down and scratching our heads for the umpteenth time this season as to how we were behind by such a margin, although Uniques' Manager John Roach actually said afterwards that he thought his side had missed so many chances they 'should have been 6-0 up at Half-Time' !! (Surely he meant 6-5 ?!!!!)

We certainly hadn't given up though, as we knew that we were capable of causing their defence plenty of problems, but although the pattern of play continued in the Second Half with both sides



having more clear-cut chances, we let in another bad goal in the 54th minute to go 4-1 behind as Gary Cokell did a mis-timed punch from a high ball into the area which went straight to Uniques' Romanian ? midfielder Adrian Herban for a badly-scuffed first-time shot which Andrew Warmerdam then shinned straight into the path of forward Raphael Joseph in trying to block (or control ?) it, leaving Joseph with an easy close-range finish into the bottom corner.

That more-or-less killed the game off, so Manager Hughes decided to bring on 17-year-old attacking midfielder Kris Spyrou for his debut (*See picture above left*) and then Brazilian holding player

Juneka Junior shortly afterwards with Colin Bester and John Mc,Loughlin withdrawn and Peter Murphy moved back into defence. In previous weeks, Hughes had been reluctant to use these two, mainly because he had been unable to attend training to see how well they had been performing, but the 'gamble' certainly paid off as we dominated the rest of the match thereafter, and although Gary Cokell had to make one spectacular flying tip-over save to deny Carlton Fleming a hat-trick, that was just about Uniques' only other shot on target after they had gone 4-1 up, although they did miss a couple of sitters late on as we pushed everybody up into attack. As for ourselves though, we just couldn't score and make a game of it, with Conor Mc,Govern hitting the inside of the post and the rebound not falling our way, keeper Neofit making numerous good saves, including one from Kris Spyrou, and numerous other chances going narrowly wide. However, our midfielders and forwards were also guilty of wasting chances which really should have been buried, and in doing so, they were just as culpable as the defenders who had made bad errors for Uniques' four goals, something which was apparently 'sorted out' and finally 'agreed' on in a heated debate in the changing rooms afterwards after Paul Woolston had uttered his usual 'they wanted it more than us' comment that always comes out whenever we lose to a side we would normally beat.

We did manage to pull one goal back in the 69th minute, but ironically we were a bit fortunate in doing so as Peter Murphy had clearly fouled Uniques midfielder Andy Sivi and then even stopped with the ball expecting Referee Hurlihy to whistle (a la Uniques' second goal) as Sivi fell to the floor ! With no whistle forthcoming though, 'Murf' quite rightly played on and put Stuart Dorward in on goal, and when *he* was brought down in the area, Mr. Hurlihy decided to whistle for *that* and give us a penalty which Nick Vertigans duly despatched for his second of the match.

To their credit, Uniques didn't complain much about that, and in fact they were probably the most sporting team we have played this season...they just argued between themselves instead for some reason, even when they were 4-2 up with a minute to go and their win (and a rare one at that) was a certainty.

As for ourselves, it was another puzzling performance where at times we played some 'excellent stuff' in terms of passing and movement, yet virtually every player made at least one horrendous error which suggests a lack of confidence, whether it be in midfield (over-running the ball), in attack (bad finishing) or in defence (too slow and/or mix-ups with 'goalkeepers' !?). How do we put things right ? Your suggestions are welcome.

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: Rovers travelled the short distance to Enfield Playing Fields, the home of all and sundry as well as today's opponents, Metroline Uniques, in need of points to arrest a disappointing run of late. Their hosts have been struggling most of the season and so it was a crucial game for both sides if not quite the clichéd six-pointer.

The team news saw Tony Speller still unavailable while Nuggett, Paul Ellerker and Steve Cokell were all missing from last week's starting line-up. On the plus side, Terry Moore returned to bolster the defence and put a stop to any further experimentation with 3-5-2. Also back in the fold were Derek Dorward and Johnny Mac, fresh from a visit to Knee Braces 'R' Us.

The pitches over at the Fields are not the best in the world and, before the game could begin, today's surface needed levelling. The offending touchline hill had not been dug by a mole, more deposited by something that roams above ground. And while it was undoubtedly canine, its mass indicated something of near equine proportions. First up was Johnny Mac employing the old stick method. However, neither the stick nor Johnny Mac were up to it so the former was discarded while the latter, no doubt thinking better of the whole shooting match as he had been selected in a central midfield position, ambled off to join the kickabout. But, to any full back or wide midfield player, the neatly dolloped pile was simply unacceptable and so your scribe, a veteran of a thousand faeces strewn pitches, used the benefit of his experience. Spotting a discarded plastic cup, I ferried the offending mess in a series of shuttles, or should I say doggies, until the full package was safely off the pitch. This was a cue for Cameraman Hughes to promote himself to director, barking out in no uncertain terms that yours truly should now move the mountain along

another 50 yards towards the corner flag. The shrift given was short. With the pitch clear, the game could commence. And barely had the first runs been made, the lungs fully inflated and possession exchanged before Rovers fell behind. A long ball over the top made its way through to Gary Cokell, again deputising in nets, who called and came for it. As the jades turned away, safe in the knowledge that danger had been averted, Cokell engaged in an unfortunate Teflon moment, spilling the ball like a juggler on Opportunity Knocks at the feet of a Metroline forward whose run, until that point, had been purely for show. Suddenly, it was for profit as he gleefully put away the loose ball while Cokell The Clown fell back on his haunches, hoping for a hole to take him away from this savage moment. Everyone makes mistakes but, for keepers, they are so costly and unforgiving.

On the plus side, Rovers hit back almost immediately, with Nick Vertigans converting when the ball fell to his feet after a neat build-up involving Derek Dorward. But the equaliser merely papered over the cracks. Rovers' passing was unusually long and the shape unusually ragged. Metroline are not a dominating side but, by half-time, they were 3-1 to the good. Their second had its origins in one of a number of strange refereeing decisions when play was waved on despite Johnny Mac being taken, in the football sense, from behind. It was a poor challenge but if Metroline were guilty of a foul, Rovers were even more guilty of not playing to the whistle. Quoting Manager Hughes' notes verbatim, "Stuart stopped and watched him run through", a fair assessment as the Metroline midfielder made his way to the edge of the area from where he passed the ball in. If that was a clever finish, the third was quite spectacular. A nippy run from deep saw Wooly get his trunks on but not a move as he trod water in pursuit of his opponent. As the Metroline player made his way into the box, his path was cleared and Wooly left unaided as potential covering players followed their men's runs. All of a sudden, the Metroliner was in Giggs' territory from where he unleashed as devastating a near post shot as, famously, had the Welsh winger in the 1999 FA Cup semi-final against Arsenal. There was nothing 'keeper Cokell could do except fall against his post, beaten as he was by the severity of the shot.

Manager Hughes' half-time rallying cry was that Rovers could not afford to even draw this match, let alone lose it. The feeling was that the task could still be completed as evidenced by Nick Vertigans hitting the bar and Del Dorward heading over from close range though, overall, it had been a poor performance thus far. But for the crowd, mainly Tarby, the first half hadn't been so bad. On the adjacent pitch there'd been a double sending off to entertain, the referee's assistant apparently assaulting a player with his flag with said victim then retaliating in kind. But he didn't use a weapon, just a swiftly despatched bunch of fives. Dogsh*t, bullsh*t and ABH, don't you just love Sunday football?

Bad was to become worse just nine minutes into the second half. A poor punch by Gary Cokell was followed up by an error from the normally dependable Warmers and it was 4-1. There seemed no way back from there so Manager Hughes rightly elected to give the subs a run out. In the 59th minute Kris Spyrou replaced Colin Bester with Terry Moore moving to right back, Murf to left back and Spyrou taking up the left midfield berth. The change almost paid immediate dividends when Conor McGovern, who'd been suffering from a week long bout of Montezuma's revenge, struck a post. Then, a minute later, Stuart Dorward was upended in the box. Referee Herlihy rightly awarded a penalty though it should be mentioned that, in the build-up, Murf won the ball after fouling his man from behind. That it was missed was perhaps the day's singular example of consistency.

Nick Vertigans notched his second by sending the 'keeper the wrong way and, with a full 20 minutes left, Rovers gave it their all. But their all just wasn't good enough though Spyrou and Juneka Junior, who replaced Johnny Mac in midfield, had some nice moments. The latter also had some embarrassing moments to report, not least when his tardy arrival necessitated a pitch side conversion from man about town to footballer. Coming over all sheepish, he spent a while sat on the bench with his shorts on his head, his concern being the proximity of two young ladies and their prying eyes. Eventually he sloped off to change behind a tree, his embarrassment preserved.

In the dressing room the post-match assessment was that there had been no lack of effort but it had been the poorest performance of the season. Despite spending most of the second period encamped in Metroline's half, the quality simply had not been there. All too often the passing was overlong and with that a high degree of inaccuracy comes hand in hand. Rovers usual strength of a willingness to play football was rarely on show and some harsh words were said, not least by Cameraman Hughes who bellowed a hearty "f*ck off" before slipping off to flog Trent Park a DVD. In truth it was a show of frustration felt by all at a season gradually derailing. If last week had been another entry in the catalogue of nearly games, this had seen the beginning of a new chapter entitled the "Nowhere Near" games. It's up to all of us to make it a short one. Come on, lads!

