

Sunday 16th October 2005

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS	2	METROLINE UNIQUES	0	HT 1-0
D.Dorward (15 mins.), Mc,Govern (49 mins.)				

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (7); Robin PRYKE (7), Stuart DORWARD (7), Paul WOOLSTON (7), Terry MOORE (7½); Derek DORWARD (7½), Paul ELLERKER (7), Tony SPELLER (7½), Peter MURPHY (7); Conor Mc,GOVERN (7½), Steve COKELL (7½) **Subs.:** Vernon 'Kizza' NXUMALO (7), Daniel GEORGE (6), John Mc,LOUGHLIN (6), Gary COKELL (Not Used), Scott ROBERTSON (Not Used)

METROLINE UNIQUES' LINE-UP: Michael NEOFIT; Obi UZO, Derek BROWN, Kevin ANTOINE, Dave THOMAS; Andy SIVI, Tyrone PALMER, Adolphus WHITE, Raphael JOSEPH, Devon THOMAS; Carlton FLEMING **Subs.:** Joel BURNETT, Courtney BLAKE, Calvin THOMAS

Referee: Kevin DOHERTY

Weather Conditions: Sunny & Warm

Attendance: 17



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

Following our excellent performance against Wormley Rovers the week before, our players no doubt couldn't wait to get back out on the lush turf of Hazelwood for our next match, although it was fortunate that they all turned *up* there and *not* at Metrolin Uniques' home ground at Enfield Playing Fields, as Manager Trevor Hughes had mis-read the website and told some of them at training the previous Tuesday that this was an Away game ! Thankfully, due to the Southbury Leisure Centre turning the lights out on us for playing two minutes overtime, Trevor's comments didn't seem to register with anyone and we were able to field another very strong line-up with only Nick Vertigans missing from the previous week and us having five

substitutes available to choose from. Robin Pryke was also able to return to the starting line-up after work commitments, which meant we were fielding our first-choice defence for the first time this season, and with newly-promoted Metrolin Uniques bottom of the table and without a win in their first five matches, we were confident of another convincing victory.

However, our opponents had evidently had a bit of a 'sort-out'/'clear-the-air' meeting during the week after their poor start to the season, and in contrast to their previous matches, they turned up an hour before kick-off for a proper warm-up session and *also* had five substitutes available, so they were certainly not going to be an easy team to beat *this* time...as they had been back in the 2001-2002 Season the *last* time we were in the same Division. (Why do teams always do this to **us**...and get there early enough to 'nick' the Home Team changing room before our players all arrive !!!?)

We actually fielded a very similar line-up to that which recorded wins of 4-0 and 4-2 against

Uniques back in the 2001-2002 Season with only Marco Ellerker and the Beasley brothers having left the club since then, but Uniques had numerous different players and it was clear straight away that they would give us a tougher match this time as the first 15 minutes saw them create



more chances in that time than Wormley Rovers managed in the whole match the previous week. Indeed their lone centre forward Carlton Fleming looked

particularly useful, even though he sported a bandana which made him look a ringer for our misfiring former Reserve Team striker Myron Mc,Kay. (Glad to say though that Myron seems to have regained his confidence since signing for Dysons Rovers, while Fleming had an off-day in

this match in terms of his finishing).

Although Uniques looked dangerous going forward though, so did we, and the key difference was in the quality of defending, as we gradually started to get a grip on it as the game went on, whereas Uniques' back four were consistently torn apart by the movement of Derek Dorward, Conor Mc,Govern and Steve Cokell. However, it was a scrappy goal from a corner which gave us the lead in the 15th minute after keeper Neofit (which is probably an incorrect spelling of his name, but that's how their Manager saw it !) flapped at Paul Ellerker's inswinger and Derek Dorward eventually toe-poked the ball over the line during the ensuing scramble.

After that though, due to us fielding Paul Ellerker, Tony Speller and Peter Murphy all in midfield at the same time, we generally defended more than we needed to and therefore unintentionally invited Uniques to attack us, which made for a really open game with chances galore being created as we consistently hit them on the break, and although Derek Dorward, Conor Mc,Govern and Steve Cokell had the large majority of our opportunities to score, virtually all of our defenders had chances as well. However, it was Mc,Govern who put us 2-0 up four minutes into the Second Half when a defensive mistake allowed Stuart Dorward's hopeful pass to get through, leaving Conor with a one-on-one which he made the most of by rounding keeper Neofit confidently to score.

We then had numerous other chances after that (including more one-on-ones with the keeper), and particularly after Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo was brought on for Peter Murphy in the 64th minute to give us more attacking options, but keeper Neofit made some good saves, while Steve Cokell hit the bar with a fiercely-struck drive and several other chances (including a rare effort from defender Terry Moore) went narrowly wide. Uniques also hit the bar though, and Darryl Johnson had to make a couple of good saves to ensure we kept a second successive clean sheet, but overall, we had twice as many chances and fully deserved to win.

Daniel George and new signing John Mc,Loughlin were both given a run-out near the end at a stage of the game when it was still possible that our opponents could nick a couple of goals, but there was no concern from any of our other players that Manager Trevor Hughes was taking too much of a risk, and that showed the confidence in our squad as a whole. With other results going our way, this victory took us to the top of the Division One table, and if we can continue to negotiate tricky games like this, we should be able to stay there, as many other clubs may well slip up against Metrolin Uniques (as long as Uniques don't self-destruct with mass arguments like they seemed to be having on the Final Whistle !)

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: Despite some midweek confusion as to the venue for today's game, a confusion that existed almost exclusively in the mind of Manager Hughes, Rovers welcomed Metrolin Uniques with a full complement of 16. Indeed, with a solid start under their belt, a jade shirt has regained some of its cachet and is once again proving an attractive proposition for new signings. The resulting latest new signing John "don't spell me McLaughlin" Mc,Loughlin lined up on an impressive subs row alongside Gary Cokell, Dan George, Scott "The Beast" Robertson and Kizza.

The starting line-up saw Robin Pryke come in at right back for Tony Speller who, in Nick Vertigans' absence, moved in to central midfield alongside Paul Ellerker.

As kick-off approached it was interesting to note the differing ways in which the teams prepared for the battle ahead. While Metrolin loosened the limbs by engaging in some cross pitch jogging straight out of the Pat Rice book of pre-match warm-ups, Rovers took a more traditional approach. Paul Ellerker drew heavily on a nerve calming woodbine, Kizza and Dan chatted

excitedly about whatever it is teenagers chat excitedly about these days, and Gary Cokell did doggies.

The match kicked off with one notable absentee. Perhaps mirroring a recent debate in football circles about banks of empty seating, Rovers prime centreline camp seat was once again unoccupied. For the second week running Mrs Bester was nowhere to be seen as son Colin enjoyed a mid-season break. Who said football supporters are fickle...

Early on Rovers sought to make use of the pitch and conditions with their passing game. Again a heavy dew gave extra zip to a perfect surface and it wasn't long before Metroline were berating one another for not picking up their runners. The visitors were fit and willing but a little disorganised and constantly wasteful in possession. The result was inevitable and, on 15 minutes, Derek Dorward rivalled last week's Steve Cokell smotherer for closest range goal of the season.

Once ahead it seemed Rovers would push on for a comfortable morning's work but, strangely, it didn't turn out like that. One reason was Metroline's use of a withdrawn striker which caused numerical and positional problems in midfield, often down Rovers' left with either Murf being drawn inside or Terry Moore drawn forward to cover. Aside from upsetting the midfield balance, this also denied Rovers a natural outlet ball when Metroline's attacks broke down. But Rovers still had opportunities to increase their lead, not least when a surging Steve Cokell run down the left delivered the perfect square ball for Conor McGovern some 15 yards out. It seemed as though McGovern couldn't miss. But he did.

At half-time Manager Hughes was happy with the football being played and encouraged his troops on to more of the same. With his bon mots imparted, the team re-took the field while the manager re-took his mobile. For regulars the sight of the manager clutching his phone to his ear for great swathes of the game is not unusual. But we don't need any more reinforcements, Trev... Rovers kicked off the second period in slightly pedestrian mode so it was to collective relief that Conor McGovern created some breathing space with a well taken goal on 49 minutes. Put in one on one he coolly rounded the Crouchie-esque 'keeper, successfully evading his telescopic arms to steer the ball into the empty net. It was, McGovern was later to announce, his 150th goal for Rovers. Not that he's counting....

Shortly after Metroline nearly pulled one back. 'Keeper Johnson, whose recent bout of Tomlinson nose has now fully healed, had already made a magnificent fingertip save when slightly off balance by the time an awkward looking wrong foot toe poke was sent goal ward from 20 yards. As the ball arced over his head, no-one was more surprised than DJ when it rattled off the bar and into his welcoming embrace. It was a let-off and a turning point for rarely, thereafter, were Metroline to threaten.

With the game entering its final quarter Manager Hughes made what he assures your scribe was a tactical substitution. Kizza was brought on for Murf to exploit tiring limbs and space, and to add a more attacking dimension to Rovers midfield. It also gave Metroline's diminutive right midfielder an even chance with the headers. Though lacking in inches, this same midfielder was nothing if not game, as evidenced by him marking Conor McGovern at one set piece. He was, quite literally, half his size and when McGovern called out, "Woolly...hit me...look who's marking me" it was to Metroline's collective shame that they left him to it. If only Woolly could have delivered...

As the game petered out Rovers had a decent shout for a penalty when Derek Dorward seemed to be taken down from behind. However, referee Doherty didn't see it that way. Either that or, having refereed our first game of the season, he decided to spare Steve Cokell's blushes.

So it finished 2-0, a satisfying if unspectacular result against opposition who will struggle for points this season. It was the second successive clean sheet which is clearly a good habit to acquire and one for which the back four and DJ deserve great credit.

Back in the dressing room the vibe was good though there were one or two concerns as to your scribe's financial welfare. So, to put the record straight, while it's true I don't own a mobile phone and there may be no laces in my shoes, I am good for more than three quid subs a week.