

Sunday 19th February 2006

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at the Holtwhites Sports & Social Club, Holtwhites Hill, Enfield

NORTHMET (RIVERSIDE)	1	EDMONTON ROVERS	2	HT 0-0
<i>B.Brien (52 mins.)</i>		<i>J.Jones (Own Goal) (53 mins.), Ahmed (54 mins.)</i>		

NORTHMET (RIVERSIDE)'S LINE-UP: Dave HALL (GK); Dave JONES, Jamie JONES, Paul SNELL, Gareth McGIRR; Jamie WEBB, Aidan MULLALLY, Brendan BRIEN, Jack SANGER; Paul GROOME, Rory BRIEN **Subs.:** Richard CRILLY, Chris HIGGINS, Stuart FEATLEY

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Simon JACKSON (GK) (7); Paul WOOLSTON (7), Andrew WARMERDAM (8), Terry MOORE (7); Foysol AHMED (7), Nick VERTIGANS (7), Paul ELLERKER (7½), Stuart DORWARD (7½), Peter MURPHY (7); Derek DORWARD (7), Steve COKELL (7) **Subs.:** Colin BESTER (6½), Daniel GEORGE (6½), Ritchie COPUES (Not Used)

Referee: Dave STEVENSON

Weather Conditions: Cloudy & Cold

Attendance: 11



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes): With Northmet (Riverside)'s First Team always being tough opponents for us...we have only ever beaten them once in six previous meetings, and that was in a Pre-Season Friendly...we needed to field a strong side for this game to have any chance of gaining the three points that would take us further away from the relegation zone, and fortunately we managed to do so on this occasion. The real bonus was undoubtedly the presence of Simon Jackson in goal after a succession of outfield players had all been forced to wear the No.1 shirt in the past few months, 'Jacko' being able to play in this one due to his house being virtually next-door to

the plush surroundings of the Holtwhites Sports & Social Club, and also because the birth of his son the weekend before had now left him free to concentrate on playing again after his mind had seemingly been elsewhere for most of the season so far.

Although 'Jacko' and five or six other players were at the venue bright and early and raring to go, the same couldn't be said of half a dozen others who strolled along just 15 minutes before kick-off for some reason...the culprits even including Manager Trevor Hughes !!!...while Steve Cokell actually turned up just a minute before kick-off, having presumably fixed somebody's toilet first !? (For those who don't know, Steve is a plumber by trade). That meant Manager Hughes had a lot of sorting out to do as he didn't know that Kris Spyrou and Juneka Junior had pulled out at the last minute because of injury...Kris having injured his knee in a 7-a-side match the previous Friday night after being tackled by Dan George (who was probably on the same side ?!), while Junior had sent a text message the day before saying 'Laurence, I broke my nail but I go try play. See you tomorrow.' However, he then sent another message on the morning of the match saying 'Lau, I can't go. My foot are very bad. Sorry. Juneka'. From that then, I think we can deduce that he had an ingrowing toenail...maybe ?!

Junior's absence was a bit of a blow though, as he had been our man of the match the week before, and with Conor McGovern and Tony Speller still out injured, we were still far from full strength, whereas Northmet had turned up with a much stronger side than they fielded when we drew 2-2 at Hazelwood back in December. They were also out on the pitch warming up (in what appeared to be newly-sponsored tracksuits) before virtually any of our players had arrived, and they were clearly fired up for this game having lost 3-2 to London Ajax in their previous match, a result which put a bit of a dent in their promotion hopes, although they were still ahead of us in



the table of course.

With Foyso Ahmed drafted into the starting line-up to replace Juneke Junior, we only fielded one midfield holding player this time (Paul Ellerker), and there was always a risk that Foyso, who was playing on the right of midfield as we continued with the 3-5-2 formation, might be found wanting defensively in that position, especially when compared to Peter Murphy on our left-hand side. Indeed Northmet forced Simon Jackson into an excellent save virtually straight away when a raking 60-yard driven crossfield ball from right-back Dave Jones went over Foyso's head to find left-sided midfielder Jack Sanger in acres of space to get a shot in, although the fact that Steve Cokell was still getting

changed on the touchline when that happened didn't help matters, as Manager Hughes decided to start with 10 men for the first three minutes rather than name Cokell as a substitute. With Conor McGovern out injured though, that was a sensible decision, but even when Cokell came on we rarely looked like scoring in what turned out to be a goal-less First Half. In fact Stuart Dorward was the only one of our players to get in a decent shot on target (which was comfortably dealt

with by keeper Dave Hall diving low down to his left), but then we were kicking uphill on a sloping pitch, and the advantage was always with Northmet in the first 45 minutes because of that.

However, we defended well, and Northmet's only other real clear-cut chance came just before Half-Time when midfielder Brendan Brien hit the foot of the post with a shot from an acute angle, but Simon Jackson made another excellent save with his legs to block Jamie Webb's shot from the rebound.

With us kicking downhill in the Second Half then, we were confident that we could create more chances after the break, but it had to be stressed in Manager Hughes's excellent Half-Time team talk that

we needed to keep any long balls up to forwards Derek Dorward and Steve Cokell on the floor as Northmet's giant central defender Jamie Jones had been 'gobbling up' all our aerial downfield clearances so far. However, although we started the Second Half brightly with some good passing and movement, it was Northmet who took the lead in the 52nd minute with a real quality goal which was arguably the best any team has scored against us so far this season as two clever dummies down the left fooled Paul Woolston and Terry Moore before a pinpoint low cross was sent over for Brendan Brien to blast in a first-time shot from 12 yards which gave Simon Jackson no chance.

However, we then managed to equalise almost right from the re-start with a really bizarre goal as Stuart Dorward did one of his 'famous' Geoff Thomas impersonations by over-running a through ball with a poor piece of control when he was bearing down on goal, but Northmet's substitute defender Stuart Featley blasted the ball straight back onto Stuart's shins in trying to clear, which then resulted in it cannoning down off the underside of the crossbar straight to defender Jamie Jones, who inexplicably headed it into his own net as if he forgot which way he was kicking ! In fairness, that was just about the first piece of poor play from either side in what had been a very high standard match, but we scored a good goal just a minute later to go 2-1 up when Foyso Ahmed scored with a stooping header at the far post from Steve Cokell's cross after a quickly-taken free-kick from Nick Vertigans had caught the Northmet defence napping.

That was actually Foyso's 5th goal in nine matches so far this season, which is a better ratio than anybody else in the club, but despite that, he was sacrificed in the 73rd minute for the more defensive-minded Colin Bester to come on in his place so that we would have more chance of holding onto what was a precious but rather precarious lead. A further substitution was then made in the 76th minute with defensive midfielder Dan George coming on as a forward for Derek Dorward with the instructions to be competitive (without fouling) and try and stop Northmet from building up moves from the back. Although that may have seemed a bit of a risk to some because of Dan's inexperience and tendency to commit himself in diving in to challenges, he actually



played very sensibly on this occasion, as did our other teenage substitute Colin Bester, and it was their fresh legs and extra fitness that played a large part in us holding on to what turned out to be an excellent victory. However, Referee Dave Stevenson really made us sweat by finding five minutes of Injury Time from somewhere. Maybe it was because he was enjoying the match so much he didn't want it to stop, as the last 20-30 minutes was 'gripping entertainment' with plenty of chances at both ends, invariably after good passing moves and some courageous defending, particularly by us...all of this being played in a really good spirit with no animosity amongst the players at all.

Unfortunately though, although this particular game may have been of Premier Division standard, both sides had let themselves down in other matches this season, and as such, will both now be facing each other in Division One again next season. The three points we gained from this match should ensure that.

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: Buoyed by their last two results – a draw with high-flying London Ajax and last week's defeat of relegation rivals, The Wheatsheaf, Rovers travelled to 3rd placed Northmet Riverside with renewed confidence that a corner had been turned. The team news was positive in that nuovo papa Simon Jackson stepped between the sticks to give Rovers a recognised goalkeeper for the first time in several weeks though Manager Hughes had to reshuffle his outfield pack due to Juneka Junior joining the pantheon of unusual football injuries. We've all heard of matches missed due to the dropped mayo jar or lethally active remote, but a broken nail? Let's hope his manicurist is on the NHS.

Junior's absence saw Nick Vertigans move into the centre of midfield with Foysol Ahmed coming in on the right. Those tweaks aside the personnel were the same in Manager Hughes' recently favoured 3-5-2 formation. Well almost. For 3-5-2 read 3-5-1 for the first few minutes as Steve Cokell had got entangled in his eiderdown.

Northmet enjoy first class facilities – the changing rooms must be the best in the league with even a fold out chair in the showers for us more experienced performers – but the pitch doesn't quite match up. The surface was liberally sanded and possessed more undulations than a scale model of the Himalayas but, despite its shortcomings, it was still such that would have had the Stamford Bridge groundsman drooling. For the record, Rovers spent the first half kicking uphill. Sort of.

The early moments were not encouraging – a long diagonal ball over the top saw Foysol Ahmed lose his man but the chance was spurned – and Rovers' first ten minutes were sluggish and quiet. Northmet were playing the neater stuff but Rovers dug in, broke up the play and inch by inch, began to play better themselves. Half-time arrived with the referee's notebook blank though Northmet had so nearly taken the lead on 43 minutes when a powerful shot ricocheted violently across goal. Northmet's right winger returned it accurately at pace but Simon Jackson scrambled across goal and booted the ball off the line at a stretch, a wonderful piece of improvisation straight out of the Pat Jennings school of goalkeeping.

Manager Hughes' interval words were to encourage his charges to pass the ball and put some low balls into the box as Northmet's man mountain of a centre half was devouring anything airborne. The jades took his words on board and began the second period in neat and tidy fashion. But then disaster struck. Skipper Stuart Dorward lost his man and a fine ball in from Rovers' right was met by a positive first time finish.

However, Rovers are back to the side that started the league season so positively and, within a minute, they were level courtesy of a comedy goal. As Stuart Dorward closed down a Northmet defender in his own box, the attempted clearance spun off the atoning skipper's shin and looped up onto the bar. The chance seemed lost but wait. Here comes another Northmet defender with own goal written all over him. He didn't disappoint. And then, another 60 seconds further on, Rovers were ahead as Foysol Ahmed nudged in an almost apologetic header from Steve Cokell's deep left wing cross. Three goals in as many minutes and 2-1 to Rovers.

There were still 36 minutes left at this point and these were consumed by a veritable war of attrition. Both sides pushed and probed, attacked and counter attacked and, while Northmet had their fair share of possession, the better situations were created by Rovers. That said, Rovers had Simon Jackson and some outrageous goalkeeping to thank for preserving the lead. Firstly, he deployed an air kick of biblical proportions to completely outfox a Northmet forward and, secondly, a more conventional but no less spectacular tip over the bar from a fierce edge of the box shot.

In the final 15 minutes Manager Hughes sought to freshen up some of the 20 tiring legs by replacing Foysol Ahmed with Colin Bester and Derek Dorward with Daniel George. It helped, but

only a bit, as Rovers to a man had given their all. But still they managed to play out the game, at times professionally retaining possession and making friends with the corner flag. So Rovers mini-revival after the nadir of IML continues and the result was especially pleasing since Rovers had had victory snatched from them in the dying seconds of the corresponding home fixture. Manager Hughes must have been supremely satisfied with the effort expended and the exemplary way the side fought for each other and defended from front to back, from Steve Cokell to Simon Jackson. A magnificent team performance.