

Sunday 21st September 2003

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Senior Cup, First Round) Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS	0	NORTHMET (RIVERSIDE)	1	HT 0-0
(After Extra Time)				FT 0-0
		Higgins (102 mins.)		

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (6½); Robin PRYKE (7), Tony SPELLER (7), Paul WOOLSTON (7), John BEASLEY (7); Derek DORWARD (6½), Leon Mc,KENZIE-Mc,KAY (6½), Paul ELLERKER (7), Steve COKELL (6½), Eric IBEKWEM (6½); Lexton HARRISON (6½) **Subs:** Barry MATTHEWS (6½), Stuart DORWARD (6)

Northmet (Riverside)'s Line-Up: Steve WHITE (GK); Dave JONES, Alan WOOD, Stuart FEATLEY, Dennis WHITE; Gary STEVENS, Aidan MULLALLY, Paul HUMPHREYS, Jamie JONES; Lee HIGGINS, Jared PETTS **Subs:** John REBER, Gary KILBEY, Dave HUMPHREYS

Referee: Michael MACKEY Snr.

Weather Conditions: Hot & Sunny

Attendance: 20



Report: We came into this match fairly confident of gaining a victory against Division One side Northmet (Riverside), despite once again being without 8 First Team squad members (including Stuart Dorward, who was still suffering from a broken rib and therefore only named as a substitute in case of a Penalty Shoot-Out). Our optimism was due to the fact that Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay, Lexton Harrison and Barry Matthews had all played well in our 3-3 draw with Broxbourne Rangers the previous week having been called up from the Reserve Team squad, and also that Eric Ibekwem was now fit enough to be named in the starting line-up after a calf injury and that Tony Speller was able to return to replace Steve Beasley in the sweeper's position with Beasley now on holiday for three weeks. Northmet meanwhile had started *their* season with a 2-2 draw against Trent Park (PAOK) the previous Sunday and were *also* missing a number of First Team regulars for this match, but with them consistently being one of the better teams in Division One, it meant both sides were fairly evenly matched 'on paper'.

Unfortunately though, that resulted in a goal-less 90 minute stalemate as both defences were well on top throughout, although we had the best chance of the First Half when Lexton Harrison went clean through but blasted his shot high over the bar from an acute angle and we also had the best chance of the Second Half when Derek Dorward connected with a superbly-controlled close-range volley from Steve Cokell's cross, but Northmet keeper Steve White made a brilliant flying tip-over save. Darryl Johnson though was more or less a spectator at the other end as Northmet seemed to be worried by our third-place finish in the Premier Division last season and therefore gave us far more respect than we probably deserved by just sitting back in their own half and defending even deeper than we do ! That made it really difficult for us to break them down and when we did create an opening, invariably one of their defenders produced heroics with a vital last-ditch challenge, although the absence of players such as Marco Ellerker, Peter Sutton, Chris Beeden and Conor McGovern...all of whom can create and score goals out of nothing from attacking midfield positions...was a major factor on this occasion and given the amount of possession we had, we would almost certainly have won if maybe just one of those four had recovered from their various injuries in time.

Nonetheless, we were not expecting Northmet to come out of their shell and be the better side once the game went into Extra-Time, as they appeared to have put everything into the first 90 minutes in chasing down and harrying our players in the baking heat and on what was a bare, rock-hard (but thankfully flat) playing surface. As usual though, our fitness started to let us down a bit (although it was nowhere near as bad as normal) and once Northmet broke the deadlock in the 102nd minute, it was always going to be difficult for us to get back into the game and maybe force a Penalty Shoot-Out, although we did manage to create a few half-chances in the last few minutes, including one where Darryl Johnson came up for a corner and sliced a volley into the Tennis Courts behind the 'Cow Shed End' !

Unfortunately though, the only goal of the game actually came from a mistake by us (a misplaced pass in midfield by Eric Ibekwem) which eventually resulted in Lee Higgins finding himself clean through on goal, then winning a block tackle with the onrushing Darryl Johnson just outside the area before placing the ball into an empty net from an acute angle. With Higgins actually having made two appearances for us (both as a substitute) back in the 1996/97 Season when he was brought along as a 'raw' teenager by his work colleague Mark Bascombe, it was probably predictable that he would score as a sort of 'Rovers Reject ?', but although it was yet another First Round exit for us in a Cup Competition, this defeat was not a major disaster as we would have been facing Percival in the next round and then Brimsdown Rovers in the round after that ! However, what was alarming for us was the way in which Northmet created a further six clear-cut chances to our none after they took the lead in Extra-Time, but thankfully they let us off the hook with some dreadful finishing meaning our confidence was not quite as shattered as it could have been !?

