

Sunday 27th November 2005

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS	2	NORTHMET (RIVERSIDE)	2	HT 1-0
Ellerker (16 mins.), McGovern (80 mins.)		R.Brien (69 mins.), Mullally (91 mins.)		

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (6½); John McLOUGHLIN (6½), Tony SPELLER (7), Andrew WARMERDAM (7), Terry MOORE (7½); Derek DORWARD (6½), Paul ELLERKER (7), Stuart DORWARD (7), Peter MURPHY (7); Conor McGOVERN (6½), Steve COKELL (6½) **Subs.:** Colin BESTER (6½), JUNEKA JUNIOR (5½), Daniel GEORGE (6), Kris SPYROU (Not Used), Ritchie COPUES (Not Used)

NORTHMET (RIVERSIDE)'S LINE-UP: Dave HALL (GK); Dave JONES, Stuart FEATLEY, Paul SNELL, Gareth McGIRR; Jamie WEBB, Brendan BRIEN, Aiden MULLALLY, Richard CRILLY; Rory BRIEN, Lee HIGGINS **Sub.:** Paul GROOME (Not Used)

Referee: John STOCKMAN

Weather Conditions: Cloudy & Cold

Attendance: 25



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

Northmet (Riverside) actually finished *below* us in the Premier Division last season (which obviously took some doing !), but like ourselves they have re-grouped following their subsequent relegation to Division One and were one place below us in fourth going into this match. However, following our 3-1 win against Trent Park (Arkay) the week before, we were confident of winning for the second week in a row, despite an appalling record against Northmet at both First and Reserve Team level in previous meetings...which included a nightmare defensive display by the First Team in a 5-3 defeat to them at Hazelwood last season, and then an even

worse 7-0 defeat (also at Hazelwood) by our Reserves against their Reserves in a Division Four match back in April. The 'star of the show' in that match for Northmet's Reserves was forward Rory Brien, who was then promoted to their First Team squad for this season and seems to have scored in most of their matches so far. However, although Tony Speller was one of the guilty party in that 7-0 defeat, he had much better defenders around him on this occasion even though we were missing Paul Woolston who was away on holiday, so Brien was never going to have it that easy *this* time. Indeed we looked very solid defensively right from the start, although so did Northmet in a very cagey first 15 minutes or so...that is apart from a bad miss by Derek Dorward when he failed to connect with his brother Stuart's low cross from right on the goal-line ! However, we managed to take the lead in the 16th minute when Terry Moore won a perfectly-timed 50/50 challenge in defence before sending a '50-yard ?' through ball towards Derek Dorward, who then cut the ball back perfectly into Conor McGovern's path for what should have been a first-time shot and a Goal Of The Season contender...only McGovern missed the ball with a swing of his right foot, then tackled himself with his left, then sent over an aimless cross which was headed clear...but only straight to Paul Ellerker (standing just inside the area), who then scored a Goal Of The Season contender instead with a spectacular left-footed volley that screamed into the top corner with keeper Dave Hall motionless ! That prompted 'Are you Marco in disguise'-type comments from a very 'healthy' (or **not** so 'healthy' if you were one of the many who had a hangover from ex-Rovers player Dave Dietman's Wedding Reception the night before) crowd of 25 on the touchline, this being the sort of goal that Paul's elder brother used to specialise in for Rovers...but not Paul himself !

That gave us a lift then, and we created more good chances as the half went on, particularly in a 10-minute spell just before Half-Time when Conor McGovern and Derek Dorward both saw shots well saved by keeper Hall, while 'Del' also hit the post with a clever curling shot. However, we also had other chances where we should have done a lot better and we came off at Half-Time only

1-0 ahead when it really should have been two or three on the balance of play. In fact Darryl Johnson had not had to make any diving saves at all in the First Half and the first time he was brought into action like that (early in the Second Half) he dealt with it comfortably. Although we were missing attacking midfielders Nick Vertigans (In Helsinki for the weekend), Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo (who had left during the week after signing a contract for an Academy) and Foysol Ahmed ('Disappeared?'), the presence of Stuart Dorward as a midfielder in this match meant we were always going to be capable of creating more chances and we really should have made some of them count early in the Second Half when Conor McGovern and Derek Dorward in particular had numerous opportunities to score with only keeper Hall to beat. However, Hall once again made some fine saves, but we really should have scored from the



rebound from one of them but Steve Cokell and 'Del' actually tackled each other on the goal-line as both of them tried to tap the loose ball in at the same time and allowed defender Gareth McGirr to clear the danger !

We then had a blow after 63 minutes when John McLoughlin limped off with a knee injury and Paul Ellerker went off at the same time as a result of not having eaten anything the day before...as a result of drinking too much the day before that !

Fortunately though, two of our substitutes were direct replacements in terms of their normal positions, so Colin Bester came on at right-back while Brazilian Juneka Junior took over in the midfield holding role. However, 'Junior', having only been in the Country for a month, wasn't used to such cold weather, and although Referee John Stockman kindly let him play wearing a woolly hat and gloves (*see picture above right*), the muddy pitch caught him out as he only had a pair of Astroturf boots and therefore spent his 27 minutes on the pitch doing roller skating rather than looking as comfortable on the ball as he had the week before.

That immediately threw Northmet a lifeline when we had been comfortably in control before that, and they managed to equalise in the 69th minute when Rory Brien, who had been kept fairly quiet all match, suddenly pounced on a clever short pass in the area from Richard Crilly to toe-poke a clever effort across Darryl Johnson and into the far bottom corner.

Although Northmet had strengthened their midfield for this match with the addition of Aiden Mullally, Crilly and new signing Brendan Brien (all being ex-First Team players from top A.F.A. side Old Ignatians in Saturday football), some of their defenders didn't look too clever at all and they got their offside trap all wrong in the 80th minute as Conor McGovern found himself clean through once again from Terry Moore's through ball, but this time he buried the chance with a simple side-footed finish to put us 2-1 up.

Manager Trevor Hughes then decided to bring on Daniel George for the last 10 minutes in a straight swap for Peter Murphy, but although they were playing in the same position, that's where the similarities ended, particularly when it came to challenging an opponent for the ball. Indeed whereas 'Murf' stood off and jockeyed without committing himself, Dan felt it was best to run at his opponent at '100 m.p.h.' in an effort to win the ball...and if all ten players and 25 supporters hadn't shouted at him to 'stand up' and 'stop', he may well have run straight off the pitch and down the path leading to Connaught Gardens, as it was so easy for his opponent(s) to see him coming and just nick the ball past him and get out of the way.

Thankfully Dan calmed down a bit after his initial over-excitement at getting a run-out and made a decent enough contribution bearing in mind he is still only 17, but the reduction in the number of experienced players we now had on the pitch meant that a third and 'killer' goal for us was less and less likely, although we had a great chance to seal victory in the first minute of Injury Time when Colin Bester got over a perfect cross from the right, but Conor McGovern headed over the bar at the far post when it looked easier to score. (McGovern claimed that this was because defender Paul Snell had stuck his arms up in the air in front of him to try and handball the cross !).

As usual then, we were made to pay for that (and all our other missed chances) when Northmet



equalised again almost straight from the resulting goal kick as Rory Brien collected the ball in his own half, evaded another wild challenge from Dan George, easily skipped past tired challenges from Stuart Dorward and Terry Moore, and then teed up Aiden Mullally for a first-time shot from just outside the area which was apparently heading straight towards Darryl Johnson's midriff until it struck Tony Speller and ended up in the far bottom corner. We were unlucky there then and we almost ended up with an even more undeserved result when Darryl failed to come and claim an inswinging free-kick right on the Final Whistle (*see picture above left*) and it was almost headed in at the far post.

We therefore had to settle for only a point when we clearly deserved all three after having three times as many clear-cut chances in the game, and the changing rooms were a lot quieter than normal when I went in there afterwards to get all the kit in. A lot of our players have seen seasons like this before where we have had a really strong squad but been knocked out of all three Cups by December and ended up finishing third in the League (without any medals) because of matches that we have thrown away. We have still only lost once and have a reasonable chance of winning the Division One title, but our older players obviously don't want to suffer yet *another* trophy-less season before they 'retire'.

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: On a weekend when snow had been forecast, and indeed a couple of inches had paralysed most of Cornwall, Rovers entertained Northmet Riverside on a veritable green carpet at Hazelwood. The weather had been kind and Rovers were determined to build on last week's win at Trent Park.

The team news saw just the one change with Tony Speller returning after injury in place of the holidaying Paul Woolston. Meanwhile, Flory Zinga remained elusive as that darned Pimpernel but, perhaps most importantly of all, Mrs Bester was back. So, with Rovers at more or less full strength on and off the pitch, the match kicked off with the home side defending the changing rooms end.

The early stages saw Northmet, a side that had been relegated alongside Rovers last season, dominate possession. They retained the ball well, moving it around accurately at pace and it was all Rovers could do to get a toe in. And when Rovers did gain possession, all too often it was launched long, by-passing the midfield to such an extent that it was a full nine minutes before your scribe put boot to ball. When the moment came it was greeted with ironic cheers from the sidelines. Even Gary Cokell's dog gave a derisory yap.

It was Rovers, however, who took the lead in the 16th minute thanks to a sweetly struck left foot volley from Paul Ellerker. The goal settled the home side and, by the end of the half, it was the men in jade who were playing the better football.

Indeed, just before the break, Derek Dorward spurned the chance to put Rovers two up when he toe-poked a grubber against the post.

In the second period, despite possession being shared, Rovers began to carve out chances aplenty. Most fell to Derek Dorward who began to notch up an impressive tally of failed one-on-ones. So much in life is coincidental but surely there was a greater hand at work seeing to it that in the week Stuart Dorward advertised his brother's stag weekend, Derek began to fire blanks.

The future Mrs Dorward can only hope that her prospective husband, the long haired lover from Lidl, regains his scoring touch ahead of the pending nuptials. To compound the irony, Paul Rebairo had been waxing lyrical before kick-off on the subject of Derek being the best finisher the club had ever seen which, with hindsight, ranks up there with nominating Flory Zinga as clubman of the year.

But it wasn't all Derek's fault. Too often the final ball was ill delivered and, on one occasion when Northmet's keeper beat out a shot, Steve Cokell raced in to slot home the rebound only to be tackled by a team-mate. Yes, if Del wasn't going to score then nor was anybody else! Keystone Cops eat your heart out.

Of course, the penalty for not taking chances is that it keeps the opposition hungry and in the game. Northmet were no different in this respect and, in the 69th minute, an equalising toe poke crept inside Darryl Johnson's far corner off the post.

By this time Manager Hughes had been forced to make a double substitution, Colin Bester replacing the injured Jon McLoughlin and Juneka Junior the ill Paul Ellerker. The latter of the two entered the fray wearing a hat and gloves. Apparently, the Boy from Brazil is yet to witness snow at first hand so God only knows what he'll turn out in when it gets really cold. Even money says a duffle coat.

Junior took up a central midfield berth with instructions to hold as Stuart Dorward pushed forward. This he endeavoured to do while doffing his cap to the upcoming panto season by

making like Bambi. This was in no small measure down to him wearing trainers due to the fact his studs had "broken", something he neglected to tell Manager Hughes until after the game. But despite the Pantomime antics and Keystone Copery, it was Rovers who regained the lead in the 80th minute as Murf and Terry Moore exchanged passes before the latter put Conor McGovern through. The Rovers striker advanced into the box before despatching a low shot past the 'keeper. This was also a signal for Manager Hughes to put your scribe back on the 3 quid a week shift after last week's Lady Godiva's worth. In my stead came Daniel George for a lively cameo. Rovers then attempted to run down the clock and seemed to have achieved their aim before an eventful final two minutes. Firstly, some neat work down the right saw Colin Bester's cross headed over by Conor McGovern before Northmet equalised via a well struck shot from Rovers left that deflected off Tony Speller. Then, in the final seconds, the away side almost nicked it when a long free kick from Rovers right eluded everyone on making it's way to the far post where a lurking Northmet forward only needed to apply a touch. Fortunately, and in the interests of natural justice, he didn't.

In the dressing room the draw felt like a defeat. The sense of disappointment was massive which, looking positively, is a measure of how the side has progressed from last season. The balance of chances weighed heavily in Rovers favour and, despite conceding twice, the defence remained a solid unit, restricting Northmet to little more than four or five attempts on goal.