

Sunday 12th August 2007

Pre-Season Friendly Match at the U.G. Sports Ground, Harlow

OLD TOWN ATHLETIC	3	EDMONTON ROVERS	4	HT 2-1
Wittey (6, 14 mins.) Soilleux (49 mins.)		Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay (40, 51, 81 mins.), Hagan (55 mins.)		

OLD TOWN ATHLETIC'S LINE-UP (I think ?): Lee Mc,KAY (GK); Adam STAMP, Ian SMITH, Lee WHITE, Curtis BRYANT; Martyn BEARD, Tom WHITBREAD, James SOILLEUX, Steve WITTEY; Joe WHITBREAD, Jack BARNWELL **Subs.:** None Used ?

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Martin LOVEDAY (GK) (7); Laurence HUGHES ! (6), Alan BARNARD (7½), Terry MOORE (7½), Steve COKELL (6½); Tem ADIL (6½), Danny HAGAN (7½), Clark WILLIAMS (7), Derek DORWARD (6½); Leon Mc,KENZIE-Mc,KAY (8½), Daniel DALEY (8) **Subs.:** Ollie GARDNER (*Borrowed from Opponents*) (On for Williams at H-T) (7), Ben DELLER (*Borrowed from Opponents*) (On for Hughes (Injured - 70 mins.)) (6½)

Referee: Stuart HANNAM (Harlow) **Weather Conditions:** Warm & Sunny **Attendance:** 10

Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes): As we have several supposedly good quality players wanting to join us this season, I deliberately arranged three Pre-Season Friendlies against teams that are of Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One standard (or better), rather than against mediocre opposition where we might win too comfortably. [Newly-promoted Harlow Sunday League Premier Division side Old Town Athletic](#) were the first of these opponents, and having filmed them winning various Cup Finals and Pre-Season Tournaments in recent seasons I knew this would be a really tough test for us, but I was confident of getting together a squad of around 16-17 players to play, even though we are still playing on Monday and Thursday nights in the Summer 7-a-side League at this time of year and numerous players go away on holiday in August.

As usual though, we ended up with just a bare eleven with no less than 24 current or prospective players unavailable in the end, not to mention Manager Trevor Hughes (watching Arsenal) and 'Director Of Football' Russell Beeden (Working in Manchester again) ! These absentees included five players who dropped out on the morning of the match, mainly because they were pissed from parties the night before, and that resulted in the usual Pre-Season scenario of the cameraman having to play...which was really annoying as I somehow knew there were going to be 'goals galore' !

When our players turned up at the venue then, there was a bit of a depressed mood, but we lightened up a bit when we saw only four Old Town players there 10 minutes before kick-off with no sign of their stand-in Player-Manager with the kit and goal-nets. (Apparently he was one of several who were only just waking up).

The only one of our players who was concerned about that was Clark Williams, who had to leave at 11.30.a.m. to attend a Christening and was therefore hoping the Referee would kick-off earlier than the appointed time of 10.30.a.m. so that he could play at least 15 minutes of the Second Half. Unfortunately the game kicked-off 10 minutes late once Old Town's players had all arrived, but at least that gave our own stand-in Manager for the day Tim Beeden time to sort out the formation, zonal marking positions and tactics (with a general consensus of opinion from the players). That saw a 4-4-2 formation eventually decided on with myself and Steve Cokell having to play out of position as full-backs thanks to the usual lack of defenders, while Tem Adil is obviously more suited to a central midfield role rather than the right-sided one he had to fulfil in the First Half of this match.

Old Town Athletic of course turned up (in the end) with what appeared to be a full-strength side, and it was no surprise to see them score with their first shot of the match after 6 minutes when their left-sided midfielder Steve Wittey easily jinked past myself and somebody else (I didn't see who because I was in orbit) to fire in a really good finish underneath our volunteer goalkeeper for the day Martin Loveday (who had somehow been dragged along from Edmonton Cricket Club by Tim Beeden and Alan Barnard). It then got predictably worse when Old Town went 2-0 up after just 14 minutes when Wittey scored again with another good shot, and at that stage it looked as if we were heading for another 9-0 defeat...as happened the last time we played a team from Harlow in a Pre-Season Friendly.

However, Daniel Daley had persuaded his friend and ex-Rovers Reserve Team forward Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay to come along and play his first game for us since we embarrassingly lost 5-1 to Dees in the London F.A. Sunday Challenge Cup nearly three years ago...another game in which we fielded a bare eleven, most of whom were pissed. At that time, both Daley and Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay were inexperienced youngsters who struggled a bit when they had to play for the First Team, but they have obviously learnt a lot playing elsewhere since then, as they caused Old Town problems with their pace and skill all throughout this match. After missing a number of chances between them in the First Half though, Leon managed to pull a goal back in the 40th minute when he was too sharp for defender Ian Smith (who looked nearly as old as me but was a very good player) and easily dispossessed him to score.

Old Star were the better side in the First Half though and it was mainly some excellent defending (as usual) by Alan Barnard and skipper for the day Terry Moore that saw us come off at Half-Time only 2-1 down. Clark Williams

then ripped off his shirt and went home...not that he wanted to at all. In fact he was gutted that he couldn't stay, but because of that, the Half-Time team talk was therefore along the lines of 'O.K., we're down to 10 men, let's do our best and treat this game as a fitness session, it doesn't matter if we lose 10-1, there's no need to argue with each other, etc.'

Fortunately though, Old Town were a very sporting side, unlike some we have played from Harlow in the past, and they allowed one of their fringe players Ollie Gardner to play for us in the Second Half, as an 11-a-side match was more beneficial for them in a Pre-Season Friendly rather than playing against 10 men through no fault of our own. That saw him play as a right-sided midfielder with Tem Adil moving alongside Danny Hagan to replace Clark in the centre of midfield.

As it turned out, 'Ollie' was quite a reasonable player, but it didn't stop Old Town going into a 3-1 lead just 4 minutes after the break when midfielder Jim Soilleux (I think ?) tapped in a low left-wing cross from close range after a really good fast move. However, we managed to pull another goal back just two minutes later when Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay scored his second of the match after a good run by his strike partner Daniel Daley.

It was then that some of Old Town's players started to look a bit knackered and with most of our players having played in 5 or 7-a-side Leagues throughout the Summer, maybe that was a factor in us equalising in the 55th minute when the excellent Danny Hagan scored a probable Goal Of The Season Top 10 contender (had it been on video !) by finishing off a slick move after more good play by Leon....apparently, as I had my head down gasping for breath with my hands on my knees at the time.

This was all despite us playing one of the strongest teams in the Harlow Sunday League with me having to play a full match...or at least I would have done had I not torn a hamstring after 70 minutes in trying to see the ball out for a throw-in. Fortunately, Old Town then lent us another player (Ben Deller) who had turned up late and had been patiently waiting on the touchline, but he had nothing to do with what turned out to be our winner, as Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay's low 25-yard shot in the 81st minute went straight under keeper Lee Mc,Kay for a rather fortunate goal.

I didn't really see much of the last 20 minutes though, as not being able to video the game I took the chance to have a chat to Danny Hagan's Dad on the touchline and also start getting registration forms ready for Martin Loveday and Leon Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay to sign as soon as the final whistle went...before they disappeared ! Loveday looked a really good keeper and made some excellent saves, but although he signed a form, at the moment he does not want to play Sunday football on a regular basis...unless Alan Barnard can somehow persuade him to. Leon also signed a form, but then he has also signed a form for our Division One rivals Mc,Kenzie Rangers as well (because he works with their Manager) and has not decided yet who to give his passport photo to to confirm the registration. However, he doesn't know their players whereas he knows ours, but although we won this match and played really well, it was a bit of a hollow victory in that we had to borrow two of Old Town's players (which was rather embarrassing), while the fact that we had so many key players such as Stuart Dorward, Conor Mc,Govern, Nick Vertigans, Paul Ellerker and others preferring to do other things didn't look good from a prospective new players' viewpoint.

We still have two more Pre-Season Friendlies for some of the missing 24 players to turn up and show a bit more commitment though. They won't be able to rely on me playing for about 3 months now (I can't even walk !).

'Murf's Alternative Report !!! Unfortunately, Murf did not play in this match.

This match was not captured on video (because the cameraman had to play !)