

Sunday 15th February 2004

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Premier Division) Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS

0 PERCIVAL

1

HT 0-1

Christodoulou (33 mins.)

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Simon JACKSON (GK) (6½); Tony SPELLER (7), Stuart DORWARD (7), Paul WOOLSTON (7), Steve BEASLEY (7); Derek DORWARD (7), Paul ELLERKER (7), Peter SUTTON (7), Eric IBEKWEM (7); Conor McGOVERN (7), Leon McKENZIE-McKAY (7) **Subs.:** Marco ELLERKER (6½), Chidi IBEKWEM (7), Gary COKELL (6½)

Percival's Line-Up: Michael HAYES (GK); Ian HILLIER, Dean BINGLE, Steve RITTER, Paul CHRISTODOULOU; Steve WEAVER, Paul WEAVER, Ben WINCH, Nicky BANKS; Dave WILTON, Alex CLARKE **Subs.:** None Used

Referee: Kevin HUGHES

Weather Conditions: Cloudy & Cold

Attendance: 18



Report: With both ourselves and our local rivals from 'On Broadway' Percival stuck in mid-table and seemingly conceding an average of four goals a game at the moment, the stage was set for an entertaining 4-4 draw but *this* time both sets of forwards ended up firing blanks, with the only goal of the game being scored by a defender !

We fielded a reasonably strong side for this match with Marco Ellerker only being named as a substitute due to his frequent unavailability so far this season, but we *were* missing key players Steve Cokell, John Beasley and Robin Pryke through holidays and injuries, while Chris 'Nugget' Beeden could be classed as unavailable in the same way as Percival's best player Ian Barnes (i.e. both now concentrating on playing in Senior Saturday football). With Percival also missing Dave Russell, Scott Dipple and defender Richard Dagger, they were in an almost identical situation to us in terms of the strength in depth of the squad they had available for this match and it was

therefore no surprise that the First Half was very even in terms of possession and chances created (which were few and far between). As usual though, it was from a defensive mistake that we found ourselves going a goal down after 33 minutes, as Percival defender Paul Christodoulou was left with a free header from Steve Weaver's free-kick into the 6-yard box after Peter Sutton 'let him go' thinking Simon Jackson was coming off his line to claim the ball...which he started to do, but then stopped half-way and was stranded in no-man's land !

In fact we were also extremely fortunate to get away with two other defensive errors in the First Half which could have seen Percival lead by a bigger margin at Half-Time, firstly when Eric Ibekwem clearly brought down Dave Wilton just inside the area with a 'thigh-high' challenge (*See picture right*), and then five minutes later when Simon Jackson blatantly pushed Paul Weaver in the back in the 6-yard box during an aerial challenge (*See picture left*) , both of which were not spotted by Referee Kevin Hughes (no relation by the way...in case Percival were wondering !).

1-0 was the score at Half-Time though, and we then really needed Manager Trevor Hughes to sort out a few things tactically...only he had *left* 10 minutes earlier to go and watch Arsenal v. Chelsea ! That left 'Caretaker Manager' Russell Beeden in charge, who decided to keep things as it was for the first 20 minutes of the Second Half before bringing on Marco Ellerker for the inexperienced Leon McKenzie-McKay while moving Derek Dorward into attack and Peter Sutton into his preferred position as a wide attacking midfield player. Although McKenzie-McKay had nearly scored on two or three occasions and looked very lively, we really started to dominate the game once that substitution was made, but even more so in the last 16 minutes when Chidi Ibekwem and Gary Cokell came on for Tony Speller and Eric Ibekwem. Somehow though, Percival managed to survive despite us producing numerous excellent crosses into the 6-yard box (mainly from substitute Chidi Ibekwem from the *right* wing...even though Russell Beeden had told him to play on the *left* !?), decent shots on target which were well saved by keeper Michael Hayes, and various scrambles in which their defenders made vital last-ditch challenges to stop us equalising. Of course Percival did have two or three good chances on the break as we threw everyone forward for an equaliser and Simon Jackson had to make a couple of good saves from Dave Wilton and Alex Clarke, while Wilton hit the outside of the near post from a right wing cross which was presumably sliced but had Jackson well beaten.

Generally though, it was a game in which both defences played much better than they have been recently and indeed it was a very good standard overall, which suggests both us and Percival are getting back to the form we both showed last season. As we failed to win yet again though, the 'inquest' down the pub afterwards included queries as to whether Russell left it too late to make the substitutions and whether we should give players a 'bollocking' in the changing rooms afterwards for not passing the ball when others were in 'better' positions in attack, the obvious culprit of that being Conor McGovern in the last 20 minutes when he seemed to get frustrated that he hadn't had a shot in the match so far and tried to do too much himself. At least our fitness has now improved after playing three games in the last four weeks instead of the one every four weeks we had during November, December & January, so on the evidence of this performance there is no reason why we cannot get the two wins we need out of our last six matches to safely avoid relegation.

