

Sunday 31st July 2005

Risden Wood Pre-Season Tournament (Group D) Match at Goldings, Harlow

EDMONTON ROVERS	0	RISDEN WOOD	9	HT 0-4
		Lynch (11, 71 mins.), Parker (26, 36, 40, 78, 89 mins.), Ellice (60 mins.), Cockman (63 mins.)		

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (7); Peter WHITE (4½), Chris AKINRELE (7), Terry MOORE (6½), Daniel GEORGE (5½); Colin BESTER (6½), Chidi IBEKWEM (6), Paul ELLERKER (6), Eric IBEKWEM (6½), Tem ADIL (6); Vernon 'Kizza' NXUMALO (6½) **Subs.:** Ritchie COPUES (5), Conor McGOVERN (5)

RISDEN WOOD'S LINE-UP: Mark HARMAN (GK), Kevin DAHM, Gareth COBB, Taylor WORRALL, Ricky PURSE; Rob BENSON, Daniel TOVALL, Ashley CONLAN, Gavin COCKMAN, Darryl LYNCH, Lee PARKER **Subs.:** Phil BULLED, Jim ELLICE, James PHILLIPS, Luke INGOLD

Referee: K. FOX

Weather Conditions: Cool & Cloudy

Attendance: 17



Report (by Laurence Hughes): As with the previous week, we named a strong-looking squad of First Team players for this match initially, only for most of them to gradually drop out again through the week due to totally legitimate and unavoidable reasons. This even included skipper Stuart Dorward just an hour before kick-off due to family commitments, while Steve Cokell failed a 'fitness test' (i.e. a 10-yard jog) on his groin strain when he arrived at the ground and Conor McGovern turned up late (and pissed) after an all-night party in South London and needed 'a shit, a MacDonald's and a sleep' on the touchline before he eventually decided to come on and play towards the end of the Second Half !

That meant we had to *start* the match with just the diminutive figure of 18-year-old Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo on his own up front, while the absences of first-choice players Paul Woolston (Injured Ankle), Nick Vertigans (Working in Geneva, Switzerland), Derek Dorward (Working in LIDL's, Edmonton), Andrew Warmerdam (On Holiday), Tony Speller (Social Commitments), Robin Pryke (Not fit enough for a return yet), John Beasley (Left the Club officially during the week) and Chris 'Nugget' Beeden (Can't get motivated at the moment) left us with a real 'mish-mash' of a line-up who hardly knew each others' names. In fact we were so depleted that Eric Ibekwem had to be named as Captain because virtually all of the others had only been playing for the club for less than 18 months...and very rarely at the same time !

At least we managed to scrape up 12½ players on this occasion though (Conor McGovern being the 'half'), and that was just as well as there was no way that I could have played as I was in agony from a bad tooth infection and even trying to concentrate on *filming* the game was extremely difficult. To that extent it was a bonus that Paul Ellerker and Chidi Ibekwem were both able to play at short notice, Ellerker being a First Team regular and Chidi being an experienced player, as in addition to 'Kizza' we had three other teenagers in Colin Bester, Dan George and Tem Adil all having to play a full game and Peter White and substitute Ritchie Copues also taking part when they will admit themselves that they are more suited to playing regularly at a lower level.

With Risden Wood winning their two previous Group matches 7-1 (against Ventega Sports) and 5-1 (against Europa), while also finishing fourth in the Harlow Sunday League Premier Division last season and being regular entrants in the F.A. National Sunday Cup, it was obvious that the only chance we had of winning this match would have been to field a full-strength side, although



according to Europa's former Rovers keeper Marcello Devizio, Risden Wood were not particularly impressive in their 5-1 victory against *them* (in which Europa had numerous players missing), and Marcello even went as far as saying that he thought we were a better side than Risden Wood on the basis of our 4-2 defeat to Europa in our first match (in which Europa fielded a full-strength side). In fact the first 25 minutes of this match suggested that Marcello might have been right, as our patchwork line-up were actually the better side during that period (according to a neutral spectator who was chatting to Manager Trevor Hughes) with our youngsters playing particularly well

and creating some good chances with their fitness and enthusiasm. That was despite Risden Wood taking the lead from Darryl Lynch's far post header in the 11th minute (after easily out-jumping both Peter White and keeper Darryl Johnson) and us also surviving a couple of other scares at the back, but when 'Kizza' was chopped down midway through the half after an excellent jinking run and then had to be substituted with an injured ankle shortly afterwards...just as Risden Wood went 2-0 up from Lee Parker's low shot into the bottom corner after 26 minutes, our heads went down really badly thereafter and the game was over there and then. That was because midfielder Eric Ibekwem had to go up front on his own with Conor McGovern having disappeared into the bushes somewhere (leaving defender and Club Linesman Ritchie Copues to come on as our first substitute instead, which lessened our chances of scoring even more), although Eric did actually manage to rattle the crossbar during the First Half with an outrageous shot from the half-way line which had the Risden Wood keeper beaten all ends up ! (It's fair to say that this season's Goal Of The Season Competition would have been a no-contest had it gone in !).

Our usual bad luck then continued towards the end of the half when referee Fox started making some dreadfully poor decisions, the first of which came about after an attempted clearance by Peter White in the 36th minute went backwards instead of off for a throw-in and forced Darryl Johnson to parry the ball away...Mr. Fox deeming this as a deliberate back-pass, from which Risden Wood eventually scored from the indirect free kick with Lee Parker heading in his second to make it 3-0. However, we had been rather disorganised at the back anyway and we found ourselves 4-0 down by Half-Time when Parker found himself onside after Darryl Lynch's attempted shot went to him in the 6-yard box and he easily beat Darryl Johnson in a one-on-one. Although Chris Akinrele and Terry Moore are undoubtedly good players, the fact that they were both new to the club really showed against this sort of quality opposition and in the Second Half we really started to crumble without the likes of Stuart Dorward and Paul Woolston there to organise things defensively. We also had Paul Ellerker and Chidi Ibekwem starting to struggle with their fitness in midfield as the game went on with neither of them having played in the 7-a-side League so far this Summer, but we had no other substitutes to bring on apart from Conor McGovern, whereas Risden Wood had four or five. In fact when McGovern *did* come on (for the injured Ritchie Copues after 65 minutes) he tripped over on a divot as soon as he walked on and hobbled about for the rest of the match, much to Steve Cokell's amusement on the touchline...hence Conor's mark of 5 out of 10 !

Manager Trevor Hughes wasn't laughing though, especially as Referee Fox now thought he was cheating in his role as Club Linesman during the Second Half, although by then we were already 7-0 down anyway from a variety of slick one and two-touch moves and easy finishes which had our players chasing shadows. It was actually a near-miss (a good save by Darryl Johnson in the 74th minute) that caused the problem rather than one of their goals, as forward Darryl Lynch was deliberately standing in an offside position (not for the first time in the match), then getting back 'onside' to receive the ball, so the Referee therefore only saw that and thought Trevor didn't know what he was doing. He therefore ignored Trevor 'going ballistic' waving his flag on the touchline...which was a good job too, as most referees in the Mercury Waltham League would have sent him off for dissent and we would have been without a Manager for our first few League games of the season (in addition to a load of seriously pissed-off players...as looks likely at the

moment !?). In fact even Ridsen Wood's 9th and final goal should have been disallowed for the ball running out of play (according to Trevor), but we had such a weak side out that 9-0 was a fair reflection of the game in the end anyway, with Ridsen Wood appearing to be fielding a full-strength side and actually proving to be as good as the better teams in the Premier Division of the Mercury Waltham Sunday League (including Enfield Rangers Old Boys) after we had given them a reasonable contest for the first 20-25 minutes of the match.

Maybe we deserved one goal though, and Tem Adil should have notched that half-way through the Second Half when he found himself clean through from the only fortuitous refereeing decision we received all match, but his lob over the keeper was a bit too strong and it bounced behind for a goal kick off the top of the crossbar. We therefore crashed out of the Tournament 'in style' and we even finished bottom of the Group after Ventega Sports managed to draw 3-3 with Europa. John Beasley's decision to quit the club during the week 'because he is not enjoying his football any more' therefore proved to be a predictably sensible one and it's fair to say that this was yet another damaging result which will only convince more players to leave us and more players to think twice about joining us. The facts are that the First Team have now won only once in their last 24 matches, and if we look at the club overall, we have only won once in our last 43 matches !!!

Sadly, the way things are going, it might be impossible to turn all this around and in a month's time we may be left with just 15 or 16 players who are generally not good enough but don't mind turning up every week to get a game, no matter what our results might be.

No doubt I will get the 'blame' (in hindsight) for entering us in this Tournament, but at the time that decision was made we had plenty of players and we should have been able to field much stronger sides than this every week. How do other clubs (such as Ridsen Wood) manage to find good players who can play week-in week-out when virtually all of ours can only play once every three or four weeks, whether it is during the Summer or not !?

Although there was no major inquest and 'mass bollocking' at the end (probably because Lee Osborn has now left), it was a thoroughly miserable day...and my toothache hurts even *more* now !

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