

Sunday 22nd November 2009

Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS	1	ST. MARY'S (EDMONTON)	1	HT 0-0
Hagan (Pen.) (90 mins.)		Foster (82 mins.)		

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Simon JACKSON (GK) (7½); Rob BROWN (7), Alan BARNARD (7), Martin LOVEDAY (7); Tony KING (6), Tem ADIL (5½), Danny HAGAN (6), Jim ARROWSMITH (6); Vernon NXUMALO (6); Daniel DALEY (5½), Terry MOORE (6) **Subs.:** Danny SMITH (On for Moore 27 mins) (5½)

ST. MARY'S LINE-UP: Andrew QUINN (GK); Michael MOORE, Alex BENJAMIN, James O'SULLIVAN, Andy ASHBY; James FAULKNER, Dan SHIELS, Bradley JENNINGS, Liam JENNINGS; Jamie FREWIN, Jamie O'DONOGHUE **Sub.:** Steven FOSTER (On for Ashby at Half-Time), Alan SHEA (On for Moore 75 Mins.)

Referee: Ray BROWN

Weather Conditions: Very Windy with Hailstorm in 2nd Half

Attendance: 14

Report (by Laurence Hughes): Typical of us, after two really good performances where we think we may be onto something in fielding a fairly settled team and formation at last, we then have yet another one of those days where half the squad have to drop out for various reasons without realising that several of their team-mates have the same idea, thereby leaving us with a seriously depleted side. Although we already knew that the previous week's four-goal hero Conor McGovern was away working in Bangalore (India), we still had a strong squad of 15 lined up for this match until the usual phone calls and text messages started to arrive on Saturday afternoon (while I was filming Ebbsfleet v. Tamworth and therefore couldn't respond). With more players dropping out on the morning of the match, it ended up with us fielding a bare eleven including Terry Moore as a makeshift forward because he had injured a groin in the warm-up and was unable to run, although Danny Smith was at least due to turn up later on as a substitute after oversleeping and missing the kick-off against his former club. Missing the whole game though were skipper Stuart Dorward (ear infection), Steve Cokell (vomiting bug), Terry Brown (who didn't give a reason) and Kris Spyrou (who said he was available if needed but then disappeared when we texted him to tell him he was needed !), so that meant midfielder Rob Brown had to play in defence and Tem Adil & Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo were both given a rare start in midfield.

Predictably St. Mary's turned up with a much stronger side than when we drew 1-1 with them in their Home game at Hazelwood at the start of October with only one regular (defender Mark Batt) missing. It was also interesting to note that he was there watching the game on crutches to give his team-mates some support. There is no way that any of our players would go to such lengths of course. Their other halves would have them babysitting at home for a start ! With St. Mary's having a large number of noisy supporters on the far touchline and us having...nobody as usual, we were therefore up against it right from the start, particularly as St. Mary's were kicking towards the cowshed end in the First Half with a gale-force wind behind them. However, we defended really well against the wind and forced them into a lot of long balls which invariably ran off for goal kicks, although keeper Simon Jackson did have to make a couple of excellent saves in quick succession mid-way through the half to keep us on level terms. When Danny Smith finally turned up to replace the injured Terry Moore after 27 minutes we were hoping that would turn the game more in our favour, but unfortunately Smithy had been to an all-night party and didn't really know where he was until it sunk in at the Half-Time interval. We did manage to create one good chance in the First Half against the wind though, but St. Mary's keeper Andrew 'German?' Quinn made a good save to beat away Daniel Daley's angled drive and the first 45 minutes finished goal-less.

With the wind behind us in the Second Half we were fairly confident at that stage of gaining an important victory, and that became even more so when St. Mary's skipper Alex Benjamin was sent off in the 50th minute for a professional foul on 'Kizza', who had raced clean through and was just about to pull the trigger. However, the weather then put a spanner in the works again as the wind changed direction to blow across the pitch instead of down it, and a torrential 35-minute hailstorm blew up which was quite unbelievable with thunder, lightning and mini-tornadoes that threatened to deposit myself and the 'TV gantry' over the fence and into the back gardens behind. Indeed several other Sunday League matches in the locality ended up being abandoned, including the one being (illegally ?) played on the adjoining Pitch Two, and it was amazing that our pitch didn't get badly waterlogged and that the ball continued to run true right until the end of the match.

As usual, our passing game went to pieces as soon as we had to contend with those sort of conditions and panic set in because of St. Mary's being down to 10 men...as if we had a divine right to win just because of that. What most of our players didn't realise (or forgot) was that St. Mary's were fielding a much stronger side than us in the first place and that they had beaten leaders East Herts 2-1 this season, so they were as good as anybody else in the Division on their day and we had actually been playing reasonably well to give them a close game. Indeed they are the sort of team who have always fired themselves up and competed hard whenever they have played us, so having only 10 men didn't really make a lot of difference. We then started arguing amongst ourselves and were continually getting caught offside because we were in too much of a rush to score, although when their 10 men took a shock lead in the 82nd minute through substitute Steven Foster, it was from a lucky break off the back of Rob Brown's heel that the chance came about rather than anybody making a blatantly bad mistake. Foster finished well with a good first-time low shot though, but he was then the villain for them as the game drifted into Injury Time as he lunged in with a mistimed and late challenge on Danny Smith in the area to give us a penalty. It was a nerve-wracking moment for Danny Hagan as he stepped up to take the spot-kick in what by then was an absolute quagmire at the cow-shed end and with his Dad (sitting on his motorbike) and hordes of St. Mary's supporters sheltering from the elements in the changing rooms doorway straight behind that goal all putting him off, but he buried a well-struck effort under the dive of keeper Quinn to rescue a point for us and celebrate with a celebratory run round the back of the goal under their noses. Thankfully no riot ensued and both teams seemed fairly happy with a point in the end, which was certainly a fair result on the balance of play as both teams had defended well. We would have taken that before the game with Conor McGovern and Stuart Dorward both missing (amongst others), and at least we played a lot better in the wet and windy conditions than we had the last time the weather was like that...the 7-1 defeat to Cheshunt Corinthians. We are also 5th in the table having only lost two Division One matches so far this season, which is a lot better than usual at this time of year, so we can still be positive about the rest of the season.



TREVOR HUGHES'S MANAGER'S REPORT

After a thrilling win in the London Cup last week it was no surprise that I had to make seven team changes for this week's league match against local rivals, St Mary's. Only Alan Barnard, Martin Loveday and Tony King started in the same positions and Rob Brown started as a centre back after Terry Moore failed a fitness test. Tem Adil and Jim Arrowsmith returned to the squad and Danny Hagan was back after injury and they all went straight into the starting line up in midfield. Last week's substitutes Daniel Daley and Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo started up front as we were missing top scorer Conor McGovern, captain Stuart Dorward, Terry Brown and Steve Cokell. Danny Smith was due to start against his old club but overslept and arrived late so the injured Terry Moore bravely played the first 27 minutes as a forward. We faced a strong wind in the first half so

we were under pressure but two fine saves by Simon Jackson and some good defending kept it at 0-0 at half time. We were confident going into the second half and Kizza ran clear after 50 minutes only to be cynically fouled just outside the penalty area by the St Mary's centre half who received an inevitable red card. Danny Hagan hit the free kick into the wall but we now had 40 minutes against 10 men with the wind behind us to win the game. The heavy rain now turned to hail and there was thunder and lightning as the wind got stronger but the conditions seemed to suit St Mary's better. They were getting men behind the ball and blocking all our attempts to attack. There were just 8 minutes left when a hopeful long ball hit Rob Brown on the back of the leg and fell perfectly for the St Mary's forward to place the ball past Jacko and give them an unlikely lead. The game had reached the 90th minute when Danny Smith rounded a defender on the edge of the area and was blatantly tripped for an obvious penalty. I presume that the defender did not know that Danny had taken the ball onto his right foot so the danger of a cross was minimal. Danny Hagan was the player brave enough to score a last minute equaliser. We were disappointed to draw the game but I felt we had done well considering the number of team changes we had to make and I prefer to give credit to St Mary's who battled for every ball when they had 10 men.