

Sunday 11th September 2005

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Wormley Playing Fields

THE WHEATSHEAF

2

EDMONTON ROVERS

2

HT 1-1

Codlin (45 mins.),
Bevan (61 mins.)

Leek (Own Goal) (42 mins.),
S.Dorward (85 mins.)

THE WHEATSHEAF'S LINE-UP: Lee BARTON; Darren LEE, Simon MUIR, Daniel FORD; Gerald FULLER, Paul LEEK, Shondell HOLMES, Kevin DEDMAN, Colin BEVAN; Paul JACKSON, Lee CODLIN
Subs.: None

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (6); Colin BESTER (6½), Stuart DORWARD (7), Paul WOOLSTON (7), Terry MOORE (7); Foysoh AHMED (6), Paul ELLERKER (6½), Tony SPELLER (6½), Peter MURPHY (6½); Derek DORWARD (6½); Steve COKELL (6½) **Subs.:** Vernon 'Kizza' NXUMALO (6), Daniel GEORGE (6½), Ritchie COPUES (Not Used)

Referee: David HOCKNEY

Weather Conditions: Cool & Cloudy

Attendance: 20



Factual Report (by Laurence Hughes):

Despite an encouraging performance in our first League match of the season the previous week, we still ended up in a situation whereby yet another player had decided to leave the club and therefore drop out of the squad for this game...this being 16-year-old midfielder Tem Adil, who unfortunately took his 'unused substitute' role against Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys as meaning 'no chance of getting a game this season now the Reserve Team have folded up'. Although we were a bit frustrated by Tem's impatience, thankfully our other 16-year-old prospect Daniel George decided to stay for the time being, while our squad for this match was also boosted

by the return of first-choice players Paul Ellerker and Derek Dorward, with Paul replacing Gary Cokell (who was working this particular Sunday) in the centre of midfield and Del replacing Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo in the free role behind Steve Cokell which worked so well for us the week before.

However, 'Kizza' was actually meant to be in the starting line-up but managed to get lost on his way to the ground (as usual) and therefore missed the kick-off, and with Darryl Johnson, Steve Cokell, Peter Murphy and the Dorward brothers all turning up at the venue well after the 10.00.a.m. deadline, it was all rather inconvenient for Manager Trevor Hughes and I propose a 50p fine for **all** of them...even though they all had 'excuses' ranging from 'didn't realise there would be roadworks on a Sunday morning' to 'the missus couldn't find her mobile phone' !? 😊

As with the previous week though, we appeared to surprise our opponents in the First Half with some confident control and passing and good organisation at the back, and it was almost certain that their left-sided central midfielder in this match (a certain Kevin Dedman) had told his new team-mates that we were 'crap' because half our best players had left

since the end of last season (along with himself). From what he witnessed while playing for us last season, he would have had every right to say that of course, but then he wouldn't have really seen much of Terry Moore and Peter Murphy before, while Foysol Ahmed had also now shown that he was capable of fitting in well with the First Team. Their experience, and in Foysol's case intelligence and willingness to listen, resulted in us having by far the best of the First Half, even though a rare 'bullet' header from Steve Cokell straight at keeper Lee Barton was just about the only real clear-cut chance in the first half-an-hour or so.

However, we really should have taken the lead in the 40th minute when our best move of the match saw a slick exchange of passes between Peter Murphy, Steve Cokell, Tony Speller and Derek Dorward before 'Del' was tripped from behind just inside the area by defender Daniel Ford for an obvious penalty. With Steve Cokell having 'famously' wasted one to deny us a win the week before, 'Del' therefore volunteered to take the kick himself but sent a rather feeble effort too near to keeper Barton, who made a fairly comfortable save low down to his right.



Thankfully though, our heads didn't go down from that and we kept the pressure on by winning a number of corners in succession and it was from one of those that we finally took the lead in the 42nd minute when Tony Speller glanced the ball on at the near post and The Wheatsheaf skipper Paul Leek then turned it into his own net amongst a crowd of players in the six-yard box. At that stage we had looked absolutely watertight in defence, but not for the first time in our recent history, we then went and conceded an equaliser right on the Half-Time whistle to let our opponents undeservedly back into the match. On this occasion, it was a cleverly chipped through ball from left wing-back Colin Bevan that caught us

out and left forward Lee Codlin clean through on goal, and although Darryl Johnson did well to come quickly off his line and get to the ball first, it skidded off his gloves 'and chest' ? straight back onto Codlin's shins and the ball just trundled into an empty net.

Of course that was just the encouragement The Wheatsheaf needed, and, exactly the same as Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys the week before, they came out for the Second Half much more fired-up, while we seemed to come out rather deflated. That resulted in The Wheatsheaf having the better of the Second Half while we hardly created a thing, and not even the introduction of Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo for Foysol Ahmed after 60 minutes made any difference to that, with 'Kizza' finding it much harder to get into the game this time. In fact The Wheatsheaf actually went 2-1 ahead just a minute after his arrival when Colin Bevan fired a swerving first-time shot low into the bottom corner through a crowd of players after a corner had only been half-cleared straight to him on the edge of the area.

We then came under a lot of pressure after that and we were particularly lucky not to go further behind on at least three occasions, with Darryl Johnson having to make a good flying tip-over save from a long range shot and seeing two other efforts rattling the crossbar from well outside the area, one of these being a typically spectacular chip from Kevin Dedman which may well have bounced down over the line.

However, we then moved skipper Stuart Dorward up into midfield from sweeper for the last 10 minutes (with Tony Speller taking over at the back), and as has happened so often in the past, he managed to score a crucial goal yet again in the 85th minute when substitute Daniel George's lofted ball towards the area was only half-cleared and Stuart managed to pounce on it and send a dipping half-volley through a crowd of players and into the bottom corner.

Neither side really looked like scoring a winner after that and as it turned out, a draw was a fair result, even though both equalisers in this match were scored totally against the run of play.

However, although The Wheatsheaf were very similar in style, experience and ability to Broxbourne Rangers Old Boys the week before (and both being typical Division One mid-table teams), we did not play quite as well on this occasion with one or two players looking a bit below



par, most obviously Derek Dorward, Paul Ellerker and Darryl Johnson through a lack of practice over the Summer because of work and family commitments, while the players who have come up from the Reserve Team squad maybe still need to get used to playing at this level every week. Given what we went through during the Summer though, two draws instead of two heavy defeats is a more than acceptable start, and with Conor McGovern and Robin Pryke hopefully returning in the next few weeks and a possible new signing or two being made, we should be more than capable of turning these draws into wins and challenging for a trophy this season.

'Murf's Alternative Report !!: The opponents were The Wheatsheaf, the venue Wormley Playing Fields, the date Groundhog Day. For, just like Bill Murray, Rovers were confronted with a match that seemed so familiar, almost as though it had been played before. And it had. Last week, to be precise.

Déjà vu moment number one came in Manager Hughes' decision to stick with his Sven inspired 4-5-1. It had been a long week for Rovers' boss with doubts over the availability of a number of personnel but, unlike his managerial mentor, at least he didn't have Faria Alam on his case. In the end the only changes to the starting line-up saw Paul Ellerker in for the unavailable Gary Cokell and Derek Dorward replacing "Kizza" who was still pondering his Ordnance Survey come kick-off.

As the game got underway, the symmetry continued with Rovers taking advantage of the slight incline and wind to dominate. Perhaps unsurprisingly in a game refereed by David Hockney, Rovers weaved artistic patterns that were easy on the eye and must have had the Hughes, L. video camera drooling with what it was recording. But, as at Broxbourne the week before, this dominance was not converted into the requisite advantage.

Indeed the half was drawing to a goalless close when a sweeping move featuring Steve Cokell, Murf, Tony Speller and Derek Dorward culminated in the latter being upended from behind in the box. Penalty! All eyes were on Steve Cokell but he spurned the opportunity for some Stuart Pearce-like redemption. In his place up stepped Derek Dorward. Now if Cokell's penalty against Broxbourne had been all Chris Waddle in its trajectory, Dorward's was all David Batty. The Wheatsheaf 'keeper employed gravity to fall to his right like a Fred Dibnah felled chimney tower and the save was made.

However, Rovers were not about to spurn the momentum gained and the second of consecutive Cokell corners saw The Wheatsheaf hero turn villain as the 'keeper somehow back-arsed the ball into his own net. There were just 3 minutes to go to the half-time water bottles and Hughes soliloquy but then disaster struck. A chipped ball over the top turned what had been, up to that point, an impregnable defence and, as a nippy Wheatsheaf forward gave chase, 'keeper Johnson rushed off his line. In the cruellest of twists, Johnson got there a nano-second before the forward but his touch rebounded in off Rick O'Shea's shin for a goal straight out of the Didier Drogba book of intentioned finishing. Thus half-time was reached with the score level at 1-1 but the stats reading Wheatsheaf Shots On Target: 0.

The second half was, once again, an altogether different proposition. With the wind and slope to their advantage, The Wheatsheaf pressed on and Johnson's bar was rattled before the home side took the lead. The goal came in the 61st minute and, on a murky day fit for swing bowlers, Johnson had no chance with one off the seam from 20 yards.

Wheatsheaf remained in the ascendancy and ex-Rover Kevin Dedman nearly made it 3-1 with a deft chip which struck the underside of the bar before bouncing out to safety. By now Rovers were rarely threatening as an attacking force so it was time for Manager Hughes to prove he is no passionless Swede by re-jigging his forces. The change was subtle but effective. By switching Stuart Dorward and Tony Speller he made full use of the captain's drive and determination whilst not undermining Rovers' defensive cohesion. And the change paid full dividends when Captain Marvel controlled a high ball before despatching an accurate half-volley for the equaliser just five minutes from time.

The goal brought scenes of jubilation and aptly demonstrated the spirit and determination now running through the team. Though it had been a tough second half Rovers simply weren't ready to be beaten. But the nagging feeling remains, just like last week, it should have been something better. Bill Murray was confined to his Groundhog Day until he became a better man, perhaps it's Rovers' fate to be confined to theirs until they become a deadlier team...