

Sunday 6th January 2008

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Division One Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS	3	UNIQUES	2	HT 1-1
Mc,Kenzie-Mc,Kay (20, 50 mins.), Woolston (90 mins.)		Fisher (10 mins.), Baptiste (55 mins.)		

EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10): Martin LOVEDAY (GK) (7); Terry MOORE (7), Alan BARNARD (7), Paul WOOLSTON (8); Tony KING (6½), Danny HAGAN (7½), Clark WILLIAMS (7), Steve COKELL (7); Stuart DORWARD (7); Conor McGOVERN (7½), Leon Mc,KENZIE-Mc,KAY (8) **Subs.:** Derek DORWARD (On for Cokell 62 mins.) (6½), Tem ADIL (On for King 71 mins.) (6), Stuart BYHURST (On for Williams 71 mins.) (6½)

UNIQUES' LINE-UP: Michael NEOFIT; Muka MASON, Kevin ANTOINE, Andy SIVI, Devon LEWIS; Nathan BAPTISTE, Orraine FISHER, Joel BURNETTE, Raphael JOSEPH; Tyrone PALMER, Tarik HASSAN **Subs.:** None

Referee: Anthony WILLS

Weather Conditions: Sunny but Cold

Attendance:
12

**Factual Report
(by Laurence**

Hughes): For our first game back after a two-week Christmas break, we faced our perennial Division One relegation rivals Uniques for the first time this season with both sides in the bottom half of the table (as usual) and not in the best of form having both



failed to win in their last five matches. In fact we faced Uniques at Hazelwood in our first game back after Christmas the *previous* season (and with even the same Referee), and we ended up winning *that* game by a 3-2 margin as well. The only difference was the weather. A year ago this fixture was spoilt by wet and windy conditions whereas this time it was dry and sunny and with only a light breeze...perfect weather for watching, but hardly any of our ex-players bother any more. Tarby didn't even phone during the game this time !

However, there wasn't such disillusionment from our players, as we actually had three substitutes available, although we did have a full squad of 16 until Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo and goalkeeper Ozel Ozerman dropped out at the last minute. In Kizza's case, this was because following some impressive performances for their Reserves, he had been called up to train with [Chelmsford City's](#) First Team in the afternoon (a punishment session for their squad after only drawing 1-1 with second-from-bottom Hastings United in the Ryman League Premier Division the day before), while Oz sent a text at 9.30.a.m. saying 'Lo mate iam not feeling well just flet sick sorry i dnt fell mate sorry oz' ! According to several Club Secretaries I spoke to later in the

afternoon/evening though, they had received similar texts from their players using the much-publicised Norovirus Winter Projectile Vomiting Bug as an excuse to cover up for being pissed, although Tem Adil seemed to think Oz's message was just 'Turkish text-speak' and therefore genuine !? Oz's absence didn't cause too much of a problem though, as Martin Loveday was too 'ill'/'unfit'/'pissed' to play as an outfield player anyway and therefore took over between the sticks...which was what we had signed him for in the first place.

Before Kizza and Oz cried off, Manager Trevor Hughes was hoping to field the same starting line-up that gained a 1-1 draw Away to White Hart in our last match before Christmas and therefore use a 3-4-3 formation again, but with Paul Woolston and Stuart Dorward coming in to replace them, he therefore went to more of a 3-4-1-2 with skipper Dorward playing an attacking midfield role behind Conor McGovern and Leon McKenzie-McKay.

With Uniques turning up with just a bare eleven (and slightly late) after a number of their players genuinely dropped out with the Norovirus bug and other ailments, we seemed to fancy our chances straight away and we were really unlucky not to score in the first minute when Uniques' keeper Michael Neofit made three brilliant saves from fiercely struck shots by Paul Woolston and Leon McKenzie-McKay (twice) in the same attack following a Steve Cokell corner. With Neofit having played 'blindlers' against us in previous matches, that looked rather ominous for us, and with Uniques always being pacy in attack, it was always likely that we were not going to keep a clean sheet in this match. Indeed Loveday, wearing Manager Hughes' Las Vegas Soccer Coach Baseball Cap against the sun, had already had to make a couple of good saves even before Uniques took the lead after just 10 minutes as midfielder Orraine Fisher scored from a loose ball after our defence had failed to deal with a routine throw-in.

However, Leon McKenzie-McKay managed to equalise 10 minutes later after beating a defender from Steve Cokell's good through ball, and we then created by far the better chances during the rest of the half and really should have come off at Half-Time with at least a two-goal lead. Once again though, keeper Neofit made some highly competent saves as Leon, Stuart Dorward and Conor McGovern all had chances galore, and it was looking like another one of those games where we just don't punish teams enough.



The Second Half saw us go 2-1 up quite early on though when Leon scored his second of the match just five minutes after the break with a mis-hit first-time half-volley off his shin from Stuart Dorward's deflected pass, but Uniques then hit back five minutes later

with an equaliser from Nathan Baptiste from the rebound after Martin Loveday had made an excellent save from Tarik Hassan's close-range shot. However, that turned out to be Uniques last real chance of the match though, as their bare eleven tired and we were able to bring on three good substitutes. That saw us camped in their half, but they defended deep and we found it difficult to get through them until the last 15 minutes when we were unlucky not to score from numerous chances, especially a free-kick from Danny Hagan which rattled the crossbar.

In the end though, we did get a bit of luck to win the game as defender Paul Woolston hit a speculative 35-yard shot in the last minute which sailed up into the sun (well out of shot in my viewfinder !) and dipped down towards the top corner just underneath the crossbar where keeper Neofit blotted his copybook by fumbling the ball over the line as he tried to jump up and catch it (without wearing a cap ?). Neofit may not have deserved that for his performance, but there was no doubt that we had deserved to get the three points on the balance of play.

The only dampener on a good day for us was the post-match announcement by Leon McKenzie-McKay that he would be leaving to join our Division One rivals McKenzie Rangers for the rest of the season, this being due to the fact that they all turn up to training (whereas we do not have any training sessions at all) and he works with their Team Manager. We therefore wish Leon the best of luck with his namesake team and thank him for his services this season, but we will probably request that he doesn't play against us as we are too slow at the back to cope with his pace and skill !?

We do of course still have a big squad of players and enough good forwards and attacking midfielders who are capable of scoring goals and winning several more matches this season, but of course we would prefer it if Leon stayed...especially as he was our Man-Of-The-Match in this game and the main reason for us winning.

TREVOR HUGHES'S MANAGER'S REPORT

We finished 2007 with a draw and started 2008 with a match at Hazelwood against old rivals Uniques with whom we usually have close games. We forced a corner in the first minute and the Uniques keeper then produced a triple save to stop us taking an early lead. The game was very open and Martin Loveday, who had been woken up to deputise in goal for Ozel Ozerman who had sent a text that he was ill, was also in action early on with two fine saves. Uniques scored the first goal after 10 minutes with a good finish after we were out paced at the back but we started to look the better side as the half progressed. Leon McKenzie-McKay got a deserved equaliser after a good long ball from Steve Cokell. We continued to create chances throughout the half but the Uniques keeper pulled off several more fine saves to keep the score level at half time. We took the lead early in the second half when Leon scored his second after being put clear by Stuart Dorward. Unfortunately, a lack of concentration in defence led to an equaliser just five minutes later as Uniques scored from a rebound after a good save by Martin. We were in control for most of the second half with lots of possession and chances being created. The fact that we had three good substitutes in Derek Dorward, Stuart Byhurst and Tem Adil meant that we had fresh legs towards the end of the game as we continued to search for a winner. However, it looked as if their keeper had prevented a victory until a speculative shot by Paul Woolston from 35 yards was fumbled into the net as the keeper was blinded by the sun in the 90th minute. Division One is extremely close this season with all the teams beating each other and the extra points picked up by last minute winners could be vital at the end of the season. It was a good way to start 2008 and we can now look forward to next week.