

Sunday 2nd November 2003

Mercury Waltham Sunday League (Premier Division) Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground (35 Minutes Each Way)

EDMONTON ROVERS

1

WHITE HART

2

HT 0-1

D.Dorward (58 mins.)

Sussex (23, 37 mins.)

**Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10):** Darryl JOHNSON (GK) ( 6½ ); Tony SPELLER ( 6½ ), Stuart DORWARD ( 6 ), Paul ELLERKER ( 7 ), Steve BEASLEY ( 6½ ); Leon Mc,KENZIE-Mc,KAY ( 6 ), Derek DORWARD ( 6½ ), Marco ELLERKER ( 6 ), Eric IBEKWEM ( 6½ ); Lexton HARRISON ( 6 ), Conor Mc,GOVERN ( 7 ) **Subs.:** Paul WOOLSTON ( 6 )

**White Hart's Line-Up:** Ben SMITH (GK); Rod RUNNALLS, Andy SUSSEX, Paul JONES; Darren CROSS, Spencer CROSS, Steve BOREHAM, Mark NICOLL; Andy MARTIN; Andy ELLIS, Martin GARWOOD **Sub.:** John GRAHAM

**Referee:** Richard MEIKLE

**Weather Conditions:** Torrential Rain & Strong Winds

**Attendance:** 12



**Report:** Our opponents White Hart came into this game having lost 5 out of their 6 matches played, with all of those defeats being very heavy ones...including a 4-1 loss to fellow newly-promoted side Lea Valley Royals in their last match. Given our excellent performance at Home to Sporting Club Tottenham the week before then, we were certainly not expecting to throw away our proud record of not having lost a Home League match at Hazelwood for nearly three years quite so easily to such lowly opponents.

However, White Hart Secretary Trevor Powell (my fellow League Management Committee Member) had obviously been up to some 'kidology' when he informed me earlier in the week that they were really struggling for players and would therefore not give us much of a contest, as they of course turned up with the strongest side they had put out all season !? (Their Reserves *also* had a good win against strong opposition in the Herts Junior Cup, which more or less confirmed that). On the other hand, we were missing seven First

Team squad members (as usual), including three of the four defenders we fielded the previous week as Robin Pryke was out injured (Back & Neck), John Beasley could not be persuaded to help us out two weeks running following his self-imposed retirement, and Paul Woolston had to be named as a substitute after his wife 'forgot' ? to put the alarm clock on after they had been on a night out...or deliberately turned it off !? (No doubt that will give *other* wives & girlfriends 'ideas' !?). In fact the only defender who *did* remain from the previous week, skipper Stuart Dorward, had also turned up the worse for wear after a marathon drinking session the day before (drowning his sorrows after watching Spurs lose to Bolton ?) and he played the whole game with his face as white as a sheet...hence the lower-than-usual Mark out of 10 for him.

With nobody having a clue where 'Wooly' was at 10.25.a.m. then, Manager Trevor Hughes had to make a 'drastic' ? last-minute change by putting the previously untried Paul Ellerker as a Centre-Half, and with a strong wind and non-stop torrential rain blowing straight into our faces as we defended the 'Cow-Shed End' goal in the First Half, we were always going to come under pressure straight away as we struggled to get out of our own half. However, we played the right tactics by defending deep and forcing White Hart into a number of long-range shots which Darryl Johnson handled reasonably well considering the conditions, although he did make the odd fumble from one or two which we just about managed to get away with. We were also helped when after about 20 minutes, Referee Richard Meikle called the two Captains together and announced that we would now be playing a game of 'Kids' Football'...in other words a 35-minute each way match because he couldn't see very well due to the rain getting in his eyes ! (He should try being a Cameraman then, as the rain on the lens meant I was looking through a comparison of a bathroom window all match....much to the amusement of White Hart's players apparently). In fact Mr. Meikle nearly called the game off when he arrived to find puddles in the Cow-Shed End goalmouth and it certainly looked as if he didn't really fancy getting wet (rather like a large number of our registered players who decided to give this game...and our Reserve Team match...a miss when they saw the weather forecast or looked out of their window when they got out of bed, 'Flu' or 'Injury' being the most common excuses). Of course when Mr. Meikle decided to make it a 70-minute match, there were no protests from our players at the time, but then just three minutes later Darryl Johnson lost concentration and picked up a back-pass from Stuart Dorward just inside his area to give White Hart their first clear-cut chance of the match. That saw their former Southend, Crewe & Leyton Orient defender Andy Sussex (a veteran of over 500 Nationwide League matches) step up to blast a wind-assisted shot low through the wall and into the bottom corner (with the aid of about three deflections ?) to put them 1-0 up and then we suddenly did NOT agree with Referee Meikle's 35-minute each way decision !

Of course that goal really saw us up against it as White Hart's fired-up players flew into 'man & ball' challenges with relish on the sodden, but perfectly playable pitch, while our players prayed in vain for the rain to stop. With the wind against us as

well, we were therefore a bit fortunate to get away with only a one-goal deficit at Half-Time even though we did force their keeper Ben Smith into one or two good saves, but despite a positive team talk during the interval, we went and conceded a second goal just two minutes after the break when Sussex (who apparently has hardly played at all so far this season) struck another low shot from just inside the area following a bout of 'pinball' from a corner which again took a big deflection, this time off Conor McGovern before ending up in the bottom corner. That saw Paul Woolston come on for Steve Beasley shortly afterwards in an effort not to concede any more, but it didn't make any difference defensively as Darryl Johnson still had far too much work to do, although this time it was a mixture of good saves, fumbles and hesitancy in coming off his line rather than the 10 out of 10 performance he gave for the Reserves the week before. Unfortunately though, he wasn't the only one playing a bit below par as far too many of our players couldn't cope with the conditions and were having an off-day, even though the wind and rain had temporarily eased early in the Second Half. However, Derek Dorward gave us a lifeline in the 58th minute (i.e. 12 minutes from time !) when he headed in the rebound from close range after keeper Smith had made a good save from Eric Ibekwem's shot. We then gained a bit of momentum and piled men forward, with several good chances being created as White Hart's players started looking even more unfit than us...if that's possible !? However, due to Referee Meikle's decision in the First Half, we ran out of time in the end and we were convinced that had it been a 90-minute match we would have snatched an equaliser at least.

Once again though, it was a case of not having any attacking substitutes available to come on which may well have cost us the match, as Lexton Harrison was suffering badly with a lack of confidence in front of goal, Marco Ellerker was getting caught in possession too much due to a lack of recent match practice and Conor McGovern was still trying to get back into the groove of playing Premier Division football after being out injured for so long.

Somehow at the moment, a repeat of our Third-Place finish of last season looks a long way off after this costly defeat.