

Sunday 23rd February 2003

Mercury Waltham Sunday League Premier Division Match at Enfield Playing Fields (Pitch 16)

SPORTING	1	EDMONTON ROVERS	2	HT 1-1
Awofedeju (12 mins.)		Cokell (14 mins.), P.Ellerker (60 mins.)		

Sporting's Line-Up: Paul MITCHELL (GK); Brian HAWTHORNE, Jean-Luc DaSILVA, Richard DILL, Mark FRASER; Jonathan BUMSTEAD, Alex BENJAMIN, Chris Mc,NEIL, Michael MOOR, John DILL; Robert AWOFEDEJU **Subs.:** Junior MAXWELL, Lloyd RICHARDS, Jermaine SMITH

Edmonton Rovers Line-Up (with Marks out of 10): Darryl JOHNSON (GK) (7); Robin PRYKE (6), Paul WOOLSTON (6½), Stuart DORWARD (6), Tony SPELLER (7); Derek DORWARD (6½), Chris 'Nugget' BEEDEN (6½), Paul ELLERKER (7), Marco ELLERKER (6½), John BEASLEY (6); Steve COKELL (6½) **Subs:** Lexton HARRISON (7), Eric IBEKWEM (6), Chidi IBEKWEM (6)

Referee: Bob SWALWELL

Weather Conditions: Cloudy, Dry & Mild

Attendance: 18

Report: With Sporting having lost their two previous matches, both by 6-0 scorelines to Percival and Broxbourne Rangers, we were expecting this to be our easiest match of the season so far, but in stark contrast to what we encountered against Enfield Rangers Old Boys the *previous* week, our opponents *this* time turned up with the strongest line-up they had fielded all season and therefore gave us a really tough game !

With three wins in a row under our belt going into this game and only one change being made to our starting line-up (with Chris 'Nugget' Beeden returning in midfield for the injured Conor Mc,Govern), we were maybe too over-confident early on and it was no surprise to see sweeper Stuart Dorward going up on a run into the opposing penalty area straight from the kick-off ! Unfortunately though, Stuart seemed to stay up there for the first 12 minutes of the game without ever getting back into position properly and that was partly the reason how Sporting's lone forward Robert Awofedeju managed to get in-between Paul Woolston and a badly hesitant Darryl Johnson to put his side 1-0 up with an easy finish following a long high 'punt' out of defence. However, we managed to get back on level terms just two minutes later when Referee Bob Swalwell correctly played the advantage after Sporting's Chris Mc,Neil had deliberately handballed Tony Speller's through ball to deny Chris Beeden a shot at goal, the ball running through to Beeden anyway who then set up Steve Cokell to score with a good close-range finish....Mc,Neil then getting booked for the handball even though we had scored ! That should have seen us get on top and maybe go in at Half-Time with at least a two-goal lead as we had the fitness, possession and a strong enough side to do so, but we then started trying to play too many unnecessary 'eye-of-the-needle' passes against a packed defence and on what was a dreadful playing surface and although Steve Cokell and Derek Dorward missed some good chances in particular, it was Sporting who looked the more likely to score a second goal with the pace of Awofedeju on the break catching us out on two or three occasions.

Manager Trevor Hughes then 'nearly got angry' for once in his Half-Time team talk (*See picture left !*) as he asked for more accuracy in our passing and for the ball to be played about 20 feet a bit more in midfield, but we didn't have much chance to do that early on as Sporting caught us out by bringing on three substitutes at Half-Time, all of whom had presumably turned up late as they were 'miles' better than the three players they replaced. However, Stuart Dorward had by now decided to stay back and defend a bit more and that gradually saw us gain control of the game and create some reasonable chances, although virtually every shot we managed on target seemed to go straight at the considerable frame of Sporting keeper Paul Mitchell. However, Mitchell had no chance in the 60th minute when Paul Ellerker scored a rare goal with an excellent long-range swerving shot in off the post to put us 2-1 up and we thought at that stage that Sporting might crumble in light of their recent form. With Steve Cokell going off with a re-occurrence of his groin injury just seconds after that though we ran out of ideas a bit in front of goal, as although substitute Lexton Harrison immediately started 'roasting' virtually all of Sporting's defenders single-handedly he then couldn't decide what to do with the ball once he had gone past them...mainly because he had left the rest of our players still on the half-way line trailing in his wake and had nobody up alongside him in the penalty area to pass the ball to ! On the few occasions when we *did* get other players up in attack though, we certainly managed to create some good chances, although a large number of them seemed to be legitimate penalty appeals for handball that Referee Swalwell consistently turned down. The last 15 minutes then saw us bring on Eric Ibeqwem (for the injured John Beasley) and Chidi Ibeqwem (for Derek Dorward, who was just given a rest). That saw them both facing their old club and therefore subsequently fired up enough to battle effectively in helping to stop Sporting create any clear-cut chances and threaten our lead, although we did have a scare when Tony Speller nearly had to go off 'injured' after kicking the ground instead of the ball and falling flat on his face...right in front of the camera and 10 of his non-playing team-mates on the touchline who were rolling around in hysterics at what will undoubtedly become a Video 'Out-Takes' Classic. In the end then, this wasn't one of our better performances but we gained another three points from what turned out to be a closely-fought match and some of our players pre-match comments about there being too many weak teams in the Premier Division didn't really seem all that accurate on this occasion.