

**TUNBRIDGE WELLS 0-2 CRAY VALLEY (PAPER MILLS)**  
**Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division**  
**Monday 9 April 2018**  
**Stephen McCartney reports from Culverden Stadium**

**CRAY VALLEY manager Kevin Watson says he is making judgements on his current squad on whom to keep for next season, admitting he needs to improve and strengthen.**

The Millers leapfrogged over AFC Croydon Athletic into tenth-place in the Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division table with 48 points in the bag after comfortably beating a youthful Tunbridge Wells on a miserable wet Monday night at Culverden Stadium.

Cray Valley, who made four changes from the side that lost 3-1 at Croydon at the weekend, dominated the entire first half but only had Jack White's header to show for their efforts against a Tunbridge Wells side that made seven changes to their starting line-up that drew Chatham Town here 1-1 at the weekend.

Cray Valley central midfielder Josh James capped off an impressive performance by adding a late second to inflict the home side's 15<sup>th</sup> league defeat of the season that keeps them in the bottom five with 35 points from 31 games, 10 points clear of the relegation zone.

"Obviously pleased with the three points. Its tough coming here, we lost to them in the Cup not so long ago," said Watson, after his sides' fourteenth league win of the season.

"The conditions were tough and I was looking for a reaction from Saturday because I thought we were very poor against a very good Croydon team. I thought I got it. I never doubt the lads work-rate. I think they're an honest bunch of lads but they lacked quality on Saturday but I thought we showed it in the first half and probably the last 25.

“I thought we played some decent stuff and they tried to play as well, which is good. I speak to people about this League and how it’s changed and there is a lot of quality and teams do try to pass the ball. Not many teams go direct anymore. It’s pleasing and a few people who haven’t seen it for a few years are quite shocked.”

Tunbridge Wells boss Jason Bourne said: “Obviously disappointed not to take the points. Same as Cray did really, we had to spin some legs playing Saturday-Monday-Wednesday. The boys worked hard like they have done all season.

“We made chances, maybe not quite clinical. We didn’t make the right decisions at the end but I think it’s about right. They were more clinical and we didn’t take chances when they came along, so no complaints.”

Bourne’s youngsters put in a spirited performance but Cray Valley were miles better on the night and should have won by more than two goals.

Bourne said: “We’re in a position, same as Cray really, we’re not going to go up, we’re not going to go down. We’ve got a very, very good under 21 side. There’s five or six of them in there today so we wanted to give them opportunities as well as rest some legs for Wednesday. We’ve got a normal-ish schedule from there so it will be a lot more manageable but we’ve got to give the lads some chances and they didn’t let themselves down. They worked hard and they battled against a good Cray side.”

Cray Valley created the first opening in the fourteenth-minute when a long ball was cleared from within a crowded penalty area and Kevin Lisbie, 39, shrugged past Jake Hampson but drilled his right-footed shot over the top of the near post when he only had goalkeeper Callum Hampson to beat.

Watson said: “He usually finishes them! I’ve just been speaking to him about it. He’s done the right thing, I think the touch was a good weight. He showed a little bit of pace to get past the lad. He’ll be disappointed he’s not scored that, it was a good chance.”

Tunbridge Wells offered very little in the final third during the match but they went

close to scoring just 74 seconds later.

Central midfielder Jack Hyslop threaded a great little ball along the deck to diminutive striker Giafranco Mici, who beat his man on the edge of the penalty area but his shot was blocked by goalkeeper Andy Walker, who advanced a long way to meet him and made a smart low save to his left.

Bourne said: "He had to take it early really. The defender put a bit of pressure on him, the keeper came out. It's nice to make an early chance and settle a few of the youngsters' nerves and maybe a bit more clinical and that's a goal but it weren't to be."

Watson said: "I don't think they had that many chances in the first half but that was certainly one of them. Walks does that, he's valuable for us, a really big signing for us. He enjoys it down here. He's been doing that since he's come down really."

Cray Valley produced a slick move down the left and left-back Jeff Allen hit a screaming right-footed angled drive across goal and past the far post before they deservedly took the lead with 22 minutes and 47 seconds on the clock.

Left-winger Sam Bailey floated over a deep corner from the right towards the far post and White was given space to loop his header over the keeper and assistant referee Danny Roberts adjudged that the ball had crossed the line in mid-air before Tom Lawrence could clear the ball off the line.

Watson said: "I've been critical of goals from corners, the centre halves and some of the midfielders attacking the ball but it was a decent ball in. It was a calculated ball from Sam and he's done the right thing with the header. Other people maybe tried to head it down but it was the right header for the moment. I thought it did go over the line so it was the right decision."

Bourne added: "From where we was you don't know whether it was in or not. Tom Lawrence was the man who tried to clear it on the line and he was adamant it wasn't in but we couldn't tell so we're not going to complain about it."

“We knew with the changes we made we took a lot of height out of the side, that was a concern and the main different there. We didn’t win enough first balls on set-pieces and normally we’ve got a few big boys in there that mop that sort of stuff up so we knew that would be the danger with the changes we made.”

Allen’s driving runs were a threat for the away side and he reached the by-line but James’ near-post header failed to trouble Callum Hampson, who moved to his left to gather.

James threatened the ball into Bailey, who got in behind the Tunbridge Wells defence but the goalkeeper parried low to his left at his near post as Cray Valley looked to add another goal to their dominance.

Cray Valley created three headed chances from set-pieces within the final 10 minutes of the first half.

Bailey cut a short corner back to right-back Connor Dobson, who whipped in a deep cross towards the far post and Cem Tumkaya came up from the back to loop his header over.

Ashley Sains came up from the back twice to meet Bailey’s corners from the right and Callum Hampson produced a couple of fine saves to keep his outplayed side in the game.

Watson said: “Ashley headed one down, again, he’s done the right thing so that’s pleasing that we were threatening from set-pieces.”

Bourne added: “We shuffled it around a little bit at half-time and we were a lot better in the second half. It was purely and simply a height issue. With a good delivery in, it was always going to be tricky.”

At half-time, Bourne said: “More encouragement and work on as many positives as they can. A lot of them are youngsters, some of them made full debuts today and just

try to work on positives really. We picked it up in the second half. I thought it had a positive effect and we want to give them as much game time as we can but on a heavy pitch put paid to that.”

Watson added: “Well, I said to them the game will change and that’s not me saying it in hindsight. I thought it was quite obvious they may change the way they play a little bit.

“There is a bit of a slope on the pitch. We started slowly and we lost our momentum at half-time and it was frustrating. On another day you can end up being punished a little bit.

“I said to the boys, I was pleased with the way we moved the ball. I brought Joe N’Guessan off because he had a few knocks, he got a few kicks in the first half, so we made that change.”

Tunbridge Wells came out with more fire in their bellies during the early exchanges of the second half.

Fourteen-goal striker Jon Pilbeam and left-winger Josh Stanford both danced their way into the penalty area but failed to deliver when it really mattered.

Tom Lawrence’s cross from the left after taking a short corner only just cleared the head of Tunbridge Wells’ central defender Ollie Cooke as he rose at the far post from inside the six-yard box.

Bourne said: “We got the ball down and played, shifted it a lot quicker. We played with a bit more width, much more like the way we have been playing. I thought we had a little 15-minute spell there when we were the better side and if we had capitalised I think it might’ve been a different finish.”

Watson added: “They had a spell in the first 10 minutes of the second half. We were very poor, which frustrates me because we’re not a bad side. I think we’ve got some very good individuals but we’re not ruthless and clinical and that’s something that we

need to develop and I think the better teams come out in that first 10 minutes of the second half and control the game better.”

But Cray Valley weathered the storm and called Callum Hampson into action in the 51<sup>st</sup> minute.

Walker’s big kick straight down the middle was flicked on by Lisbie and Bailey pounced, cut into the box and his left-footed angled drive from 15-yards was initially spilt by the keeper before he gathered.

Tunbridge Wells’ best move of the game, however, arrived in the 58<sup>th</sup> minute.

Hyslop played the ball into Pilbeam’s feet and he laid the ball off to an unmarked Stanford, whose left-footed angled drive from the left-hand side of the box brought a routine save from Walker, holding the ball as he went down low to his right at his near post.

Bourne said: “Jon is a little bit too honest there, I think if he goes down it’s a penalty. There was a little bit of contact in there and he stayed on his feet and we had a series of shots and chances from there. A good save by the keeper in the end but again a chance that went begging.”

Walker added: “They put us under pressure from that period of the game. We generally restricted them to shots in and around the box. Walks is a good goalkeeper, that’s bread and butter for him so I would expect him to save them.”

Dobson played the ball up from midfield into Lisbie’s feet and he held the ball up on the edge of the box before teeing up substitute Ryan Flack, whose low drive was comfortably saved by the home keeper.

But Callum Hampson pulled off two brilliant saves to frustrate Cray Valley further around the 65<sup>th</sup> minute mark.

Bailey placed his left-footed free-kick towards the bottom left-hand corner from a

central position from 24-yards, and the keeper got down swiftly low to his right to tip the ball around the post for a corner.

Bourne said: "Callum's come from the under 21s, its' the first time that he's played this season but he's made a few good saves. That was maybe the pick of the bunch."

Watson said: "For a young lad, a really sensible free-kick, the way he took it because too often people try to take the leather off the ball but considering the surface he placed it and it was a decent strike. The keeper's done well to be fair because if he parries it out we've got people following it in."

Flack then shifted to the by-line to wrap his foot around the ball and Lisbie rose at the far post to plant his header towards the back of the net from six-yards, which brought another excellent save from the home stopper.

Watson said: "He had a couple toady Lisbie, he hasn't done a lot wrong. There was one in the first half the header from Ash that's gone straight at the goalkeeper, it was similar to that. He's got up well, if we put balls into the box like that, that's what he's about, put it in the right area, he's not done a lot wrong. I can't really criticise him, it's a great save from the goalkeeper."

Bourne added: "We felt the tied had just turned at that point, which is why we decided to spin a few legs and bring Jack Harris and Jared Trespardenne on. We started the first 15 of the half well and it just started to turn a little bit and it was another good chance for them."

James released Flack in behind a tiring Tunbridge Wells defence and he dragged his left-footed shot across goal and past the far post.

Stanford had a couple of long-range shots which were comfortably gobbled up by Walker, before Cray Valley finally killed the game off with 37 minutes and 54 seconds on the clock.

Winger Denzel Gayle, who was kept quiet by Alfie Hall, broke down the right and sprinted past Hall's replacement, Greg Skinner, crossed low for Lisbie, who tried to get the ball out from under his feet inside the box before cut the ball inside for James to prod the ball into the bottom left-hand corner from six-yards.

Watson said: "I think that's a trademark of some of those players. Denzel's pace and determination down the right. It's been frustrating for Denzel because he's been missing through injury. A big pitch like that, one-on-one goes past the lad and manages to pick Lisbie out, great turn, gets across him, been patient because he knew the finish wasn't on, squared it and Josh is coming in from midfield and that was good from us today that the midfielders were joining in because that's important."

Praising man-of-the-match James, Watson said: "Good player. He plays in a couple of positions for us. He's running the Marathon, he's a super fit lad, very tidy on the ball, very good player. When I first came in I think it was difficult for him but as the team's developed he's definitely been one that's stamped his mark."

Bourne added: "I thought that was a little bit of a sucker-punch really. We had a good little spell then, they broke well, like they do.

"Alfie Hall came off injured and I thought he had a superb game against Denzel because he's quick but I thought he had him in his pocket today. He's comes off, he breaks away and they punish us."

Tunbridge Wells substitute striker Jack Harris did well to hold the ball up on the edge of the Millers penalty area but Lawrence skied his shot harmlessly over the bar from 25-yards at the end of a disappointing outcome from the home side.

Both sides are in action again on Wednesday night as Bourne takes his side to sixth-placed Lordswood, while Watson's men host eighth-placed Deal Town.

"We just have to try to get the highest placed finish that we can, that's the objective," said Watson.

“Some of them are playing to be at the club next year, that’s the reality of it. We’re starting to try to build something over time at the club and they realise it’s a good club to be at.

“We’ve got a Cup Final (London Senior Cup against Balham) and people are playing for their shirts there.

“I want characters that want to go out and win every game regardless of what they feel is at stake. We need to create a winning mentality.

“There’s still some judgements on some players going into next season. I need to improve and strengthen next season so I’m going to have to bring in some players. I’ve got some target players that I want to bring in. I’m still making judgements on some of our players on where I need to strengthen because at the moment it’s a little bit inconsistent. There were players very good tonight that were very poor on Saturday.”

On team selection for Deal, Watson revealed: “We’re going to change the team again on Wednesday. Callum Willock, Enoch Adjei and Alex Nelson will probably start because you’ve got three games in that period of time and you need to utilise the squad so everyone will have a chance and we’ll pick a team and a squad for the final.”

Tunbridge Wells should have enough left in the tank to ensure they stay up this season.

“Again, we’ll rotate legs like we had to tonight. It will be exactly the same, we sort of planned this will be the way so the boys who didn’t play will play Lordswood then we’ll get everyone back together for Saturday and we’ll go strong as we can until the end,” revealed Bourne.

“It wasn’t great last season but we’ve got a Cup Final (Challenge Cup v Whitstable Town) and we went out of the other cup (Kent Reliance Senior Trophy) to Sheppey

in the Quarter-Finals and we had a great run in the FA Cup so progress has been made.

“We’ve got some great youngsters coming through. Tom Lawrence has come through the under 21s, so we’ve got some very good local players, which was what the clubs objective was as well.

“We’d like to finish a bit higher in the league but all in all there’s definitely been improvement.”

On next season’s plans, Bourne said: “If we can keep everyone that we’ve got, keep that together, that’s our main objective. We’ve got a nice little group together here, gone on a good little run from the turn of the year.

“We’ve got the nucleus of something there and as long as we can keep the boys and maybe add one or two to the group and build from there.”

**Tunbridge Wells: Callum Hampson, Ian Parsons, Alfie Hall (Greg Skinner 80), Tom Lawrence, Ollie Cooke, Jake Hampson, Harry Osborne (Jared Tresparden 70), Jack Hyslop, Jon Pilbeam, Giafranco Mici (Jack Harris 70), Josh Stanford.**

**Subs: Josh Biddlecombe, Cameron Hall**

**Cray Valley (Paper Mills): Andy Walker, Connor Dobson, Jeff Allen, Jack White, Cem Tumkaya, Ashley Sains, Denzel Gayle, Josh James, Joseph N’Guessan (Ryan Flack 46), Kevin Lisbie (Calum Willock 84), Sam Bailey (Enoch Adjei 84).**

**Subs: Simon Glover, Alex Nelson**

**Goals: Jack White 23, Josh James 83**

**Attendance: 122**

**Referee: Mr Matt Charles (Chatham)**

**Assistants: Mr John Quirke (Maidstone) & Mr Danny Roberts (Maidstone)**