

Wednesday 09th May 2018

Balham  4 – 1  Cray Valley (Paper Mills)

Location Silver Jubilee Park, Townsend Lane, Kingsbury, London NW9 7NE

Kickoff 09/05/2018 19:45

BALHAM 4-1 CRAY VALLEY (PAPER MILLS)

London Senior Cup (Sponsored by Coventry Scaffolding) Final

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Stephen McCartney reports from Silver Jubilee Park

CRAY VALLEY (Paper Mills) manager Kevin Watson says there were too many below par performances from his players after being thrashed by brilliant Balham.

The London Senior Cup (Sponsored by Coventry Scaffolding) holders surrendered their grasp of the prestigious silverware after being torn apart by an impressive attack minded Balham outfit.

Greg Cutwell's side defeated Cockfosters (2-0); AFC Wimbledon (1-0); Hendon (2-1) and Dulwich Hamlet (1-0) to reach their first London Senior Cup Final, after winning the London Senior Trophy the year before.

The Millers defeated Greenwich Borough (5-3 on penalties after a 1-1 draw); Croydon (3-2) and Tooting & Mitcham United (2-0) and were simply not at the races at Silver Jubilee Park in Kingsbury tonight.

Balham completed their debut Combined Counties League Premier Division campaign in sixth-place on 75 points from 42 games on Monday, while Cray Valley completed their 38 game Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division campaign on 28 April in sixth-place with 63 points on the board.

Balham opened the floodgates through Tomasz Wocial's sixth minute penalty but Cray Valley grabbed an equaliser through Cem Tumkaya's header as the centre half made amends for conceding the penalty.

Holding midfielder James Gallagher popped up on the edge of the Cray Valley box to give Balham a deserved lead.

Balham picked up the trophy thanks to striker Ibrahim Olutade scoring a second half brace to take his scoring tally for the season to 34 goals.

"They thoroughly deserved to win, they were the best team for 90 minutes without a shadow of a doubt, a very good team," admitted Watson.

"We were poor, the scoreline could've been more to be honest. I thought they were fully in control

of the game. We had too many below par performances.

“I’ve got no problem when a teams a lot better than you and they was a lot better than us today.

“We conceded some poor goals. Three of the four goals were poor from our perspective. A penalty, a bloke gets in behind for one of them and then a ricochet for another one.”

There were too many Cray Valley players not on their game tonight, one of them being left-winger Ryan Flack, who hit a speculative 30-yarder sailing harmlessly wide from the left-hand side after only 35 seconds.

Balham opened the scoring when Olutade controlled the ball before hooking the ball out to winger Anis Nuur and he played in Jordan Alonge, who poked the ball past Tumkaya, who committed the foul.

Wocial stepped up to drill his left-footed shot nestling into the bottom right-hand corner with only five minutes and 8 seconds on the clock.

“Poor defending as a team, bad decision from Cem diving in. He needs to stand up there. A good penalty, Walks has gone the right way. We deserved to go 1-0 down,” added Watson.

The only player that can come out of this disaster with any credit is right-winger Denzel Gayle, who gave Balham left-back Jake Henry the run around for the 79 minutes that he was on the pitch.

“Denzel can do that, Denzel’s a good player. He’s very direct, very quick, very honest and he can be better than what you’ve seen today, definitely,” said Watson.

Alex Nelson cracked a right-footed drive towards goal from 30-yards, which deflected over the Balham crossbar.

Gallagher issued Cray Valley a warning when he broke at the defence and rolled his shot across the keeper and past the far post.

There were many times when Cray Valley’s defence couldn’t get the ball off some highly-talented, technical and attack minded Balham footballers.

Somehow, Cray Valley grabbed an equaliser with 11 minutes and 10 seconds on the clock.

Kevin Lisbie drew a foul from Wocial and Nelson whipped in a deep right-footed free-kick from 35-yards goal towards the far post and Tumkaya buried his downward header into the net from four-yards out to score his second goal of the season.

Watson said: “Good delivery, good header. I complain possibly that we’re not threatening enough from set-pieces. We’ve got people who are decent in the air, it was pleasing to get back into it.”

Balham hit-man Olutade toe-poked his shot just past the foot of the right-hand post from 18-yards just 59 seconds after the Millers found a way back into this one-sided game.

Cray Valley keeper Andy Walker made a fine save in the 15th minute.

Marco Erriu played the ball out from the back along the deck into Nuur who cut the ball back from inside the left-channel to Henry, who played the ball inside to Arsen Ujkaj and the central midfielder's right-footed drive from 35-yards moved and dipped in the air and a diving Walker made the block with his legs.

"I thought that lad was the best player on the pitch," Watson said of 18-goal talent Ujkaj.

"I thought he ran the show, technically very good, good vision, so not surprised!"

Lisbie played Gayle in behind Henry and his deep cross came out to left-back Matthew Parsons, who drilled his shot harmlessly over the crossbar from a couple of yards inside the Balham penalty area.

Cray Valley right-back Tommy Osborne clipped the ball down the line and Lisbie linked up with Gayle down the right again and the winger cut into the box and Balham keeper Haydn Read got down low at his near post to flick the drilled cross from a tight angle away.

Balham's right-back Luke Fenlon's role was more of a wing-back as he advanced into the final third many times during the first half. Halfway through the half he hit a right-footed dipping drive over from 25-yards after Alonge played the ball out to him from the centre.

Balham deservedly took the lead with 23 minutes and 37 seconds on the clock, courtesy of a slick three-man move.

Olutade played the ball through the heart of the pitch to Alonge, who split open the Millers defence with a short pass and Gallagher placed his shot past the diving Walker into the back of the net from 18-yards.

Watson said: "Again, a bit frustrating that side of the defending there. I thought we got sucked over and left a little bit of space on our right, their left and Tommy's had to come over and cover but a good finish from the lad."

Out-played Cray Valley found a way back into the game ten minutes before the break.

Matthew Parsons' drilled a low free-kick from 19-yards into the base of the wall and the ball rolled across the penalty area to Tumkaya and his low shot was easily gathered by Read.

Parsons then threw the ball to Flack, whose shot on the turn from 30-yards bounced comfortably

into the Balham keeper's hands.

Jack White then hit his shot sailing over the top of the far post from the side of the penalty area after more impressive wing play from Gayle.

"I thought actually we responded quite well after conceding the second for a period of time but sometimes it's easier to play when you're losing like that," said Watson.

"I thought we responded ok. Whilst there was only one goal, I still thought they were the better team overall but I thought we upped our game a little bit but we wasn't threatening enough in certain positions.

"At half-time Kevin James went through tactical bits and pieces and a bit on our defensive shape and he's very good at that.

"I just think there were too many below par performances and the standards that the players have set themselves."

Balham continued their impressive attacking game in the second half and called Walker into making a great diving save in the 51st minute.

Ujkaj drove forward from midfield and played the ball into Nuur, who cut the ball onto his left-foot in the centre and drove his shot towards the top left-hand corner from 25-yards, which Walker flew to his right to tip around the post.

"Walker is good at that, he nearly got near the pen, they could've had a few more if it wasn't for him," added Watson.

Cray Valley went close to scoring following their third of four corners.

Flack cut the ball back from the right towards the edge of the Balham penalty area for Ashley Sains to sweep his first time shot just over the bar with his right-boot.

Balham killed the game off with their third goal with 11 minutes and 35 seconds on the clock.

Winger Nuur, who was now hurting Cray Valley through the heart of the pitch, played in Olutade, but Osborne got to the ball first and his attempted clearance ricochet off Olutade on the edge of the box and sailed over flat-footed Walker's right-shoulder into the top left-hand corner.

"Tom's covered well, he's gone to clear it and it was one of them, a little bit of luck for that one but they deserved to go 3-1 up regardless," said Watson.

"Tom's kicked it against him, it's hit him and then gone in. They didn't need any (luck), we needed a bit of luck!"

Nelson swung in the Millers final corner, from the left, Balham failed to clear their lines and the ball came out to Gayle, who smacked his volley over the bar from 22-yards.

Watson made a double substitution and brought on Calum Willock and Enoch Adjei and threw them up top to support Lisbie, while Parsons and Gayle were deployed as wing-backs and a back three of Tumkaya, Osborne and Sains.

Ujkaj, who bossed the middle of the pitch, played a diagonal pass along the deck to Fenlon, who whipped in a low cross from the channel to Alonge, who swept his first time shot which deflected off Osborne and sailed just past the far post.

Osborne took his frustrations out on Alonge and picked up a yellow card and Balham scored their fourth goal from the resulting free-kick, timed at 24 minutes and 40 seconds.

Centre half Hamish Frew hit a long set-piece over the top through the heart of the pitch and Olutade flicked his shot over the advancing Walker from the edge of the box, the ball dropping into the bottom right-hand corner despite Sains' desire to get back on his line to clear.

“Disappointing, it’s just a free-kick, it’s just a set-piece and we were caught flat. One ball over the top and he just finishes it, poor from us,” added Watson.

“When they get the fourth, it’s out of sight. There was still a little bit of time but when we go 1-0 down and we have done that a few times and that’s something we need to address and it’s often sparked a reaction but today we just didn’t seem to have that about us.

“I know we pulled it back to one-all but it didn’t feel right, the players weren’t on the same page and we were too far off defensively and we weren’t keeping the ball well enough.”

Watson brought on substitute winger Sam Bailey to give him game-time in a final and he ensured Read made a save just 42 seconds into his introduction.

Parsons played the ball up to Lisbie, who swept the ball out to Bailey, who cut inside and from 25-yards his low angled drive was comfortably held by the keeper on his knees.

“Sam’s direct. It was a bit of a roll of a dice at that point to be honest. It was just to get people on the pitch that deserved to. I feel sorry for Connor Dobson and Simon Glover that haven’t managed to get on today. Joe N’Guessan was suspended, Jeff Allen was cup-tied and Jordan Sandiford, who didn’t make the squad. The ones I feel sorry for are the ones that haven’t had an opportunity today.”

Balham’s two better players linked up down the right and the crossbar saved Cray Valley further embarrassment.

Olutade played the ball in from the right and Nuur swept a first time shot from outside the penalty area over Walker's right shoulder, the ball crashing down off the underside of the crossbar.

"I thought they were in full control. If they needed any more goals they would've probably have been able to get them at that point," admitted Watson.

"They are a very, very good team. They remind me a lot of Croydon in our league, very well drilled, probably come through a youth system, been worked on a lot of pattern of play. Some of their players, I've got no doubt that they'll go on and play higher. There are a good team who are possibly at the top of their game today and when you've got a team like that that weren't then you get the result and performance that we did."

Walker dived to his right to see Ujkaj's right-footed free-kick from 35-yards dip just past the foot of the left-hand upright.

Nuur crossed the ball towards the edge of the Millers box, the ball was brought down by Olutade and he laid the ball off for Ujkaj to hook his volley screaming across Walker to bounce against the base of the far post in the 87th minute.

Cray Valley had no defence tonight and they allowed man-of-the-match Nuur to run through before slotting his shot just past the foot of the post.

The Millers could have pulled a second goal back at the death but Bailey couldn't find the touch at the far post to hook the ball in after Lisbie teed-him up after Josh James' put the ball over from the left.

Watson wants his players to go away and report back for pre-season training with the fire in their bellies to be successful, something that was clearly missing tonight.

Top-six finisher Watson said: "No excuses! We've done ok to get here but once you're here there's no consolation, you pick up a runners-up medal.

"It's a learning process as well. We need to get something out of the game like this. I said to the lads afterwards, they've got a couple of months rest until the start of pre-season at our club or another club and they mustn't go into a negative mindset, they must use this experience to work hard, be fitter, be stronger, be better going into next season."

Balham: Haydn Read, Luke Fenlon (Michael McConnell 85), Jake Henry, James Gallagher (Josh Benson 89), Marco Erriu, Hamish Frew, Anis Nuur, Arsen Ujkaj, Ibrahim Olutade, Jordan Alonge, Tomasz Wocial (Khalid Savage 82).

Subs: Michael Neish, Elliot Garcia

Goals: Tomasz Wocial 6 (penalty), James Gallagher 24, Ibrahim Olutade 57, 70

Booked: Tomasz Wocial 61, Ibrahim Olutade 81

Cray Valley (Paper Mills): Andy Walker, Tommy Osborne, Matthew Parsons, Jack White (Enoch Adjei 62), Cem Tumkaya, Ashley Sains, Denzel Gayle (Sam Bailey 79), Josh James, Kevin Lisbie, Alex Nelson, Ryan Flack (Calum Willock 62).

Subs: Simon Glover, Connor Dobson

Goal: Cem Tumkaya 12

Booked: Tommy Osborne 70, Josh James 87

Attendance: 317

Referee: Mr Lee Brennan (Westminster, London SW1)

Assistants: Mr Dele Sotimirin (Stratford, London E20) & Mr Tom Danaher (Camden, London NW1)

Fourth Official: Mr Paul Howard (Bermondsey, London SE16)