

CROYDON 0-2 CRAY VALLEY (PAPER MILLS)
Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division
Wednesday 12 December 2018
Stephen McCartney reports from Croydon Sports Arena

CRAY VALLEY (Paper Mills) manager Kevin Watson says now is the time for his side to mount a serious title challenge.

The Millers put in a professional performance to beat a poor Croydon side, courtesy of goals from attackers Anthony Edgar and Francis Babalola. Cray Valley climbed up a couple of places into fourth in the Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division table with 33 points from 16 games and are now seven points adrift of the leaders Fisher with a couple of games in hand.

Croydon remain rooted to the foot of the table with three points from 16 games and they have lost all eight of their home league games this season and are eight points adrift of safety. While Watson undertook his media duties inside the warmth of the clubhouse on a bitterly cold night, Croydon manager Chris Brown said "he was not in the mood for an interview," when approached for an eight minute chat – despite the club regularly complaining about the lack of publicity from their local newspapers.

Croydon's long-suffering fans need to know answers as to how Brown is going to turn things around as his record of one win in 15 games since he took over from Craig Davis and five defeats on the spin (in all competitions) is poor and the club are favourites to go down at the end of the season. Brown handed three players (goalkeeper Ryan Farrer, left-back Samuel Salis and central midfielder Denzil Rolle) their debuts, taking the total players used in 26 games to 58.

"Job done! Difficult coming to places like this. I know they're not doing great in the league but this was a potential banana skin," said Watson. "I was disappointed with the loss (3-2 at home to Deal Town) on Saturday, it was important that we bounced back. "The players probably haven't enjoyed it, not the usual fluid football that we like to play, I get that. If they want to be successful and achieve things then all teams have to be able to perform under similar challenging circumstances."

Keeper Farrer pulled off a great one-handed save to frustrate Cray Valley inside the opening four minutes. Edgar swung in a corner from the right, the ball came out to centre-half Liam Hickey, who flicked a right-footed volley towards the bottom corner from 14-yards, but the Croydon keeper dived to his right to get a strong right-hand to the ball to turn it behind. "Good strike from Liam, sensible. He was a bit off-balance so he just tried to get it on target," said Watson.

Cray Valley holding midfielder Jack White fed the ball into Edgar, who slipped in Joe N'Guessan, who bent his low shot around the base of the far post when he only had keeper Farrer to beat from 12-yards. "I think he was trying to do the right thing, he was trying to pass it in, which he usually does quite well. Whether it's the surface, he doesn't quite get it right but a good opportunity that one," said Watson.

Cray Valley deservedly opened the scoring with 14 minutes and 4 seconds on the clock. Right-wing-back Chris Edwards flicked a pass into Babalola, who ran into the box and held the ball up while he waited for support before he cut the ball back to Edgar, who from the centre of the pitch, 20-yards from goal, swept his right-footed shot into the bottom left-hand corner to score his 18th goal of the season. "A good strike because it's a sensible one. It's accurate, it's in the corner," said Watson. "Pleasing to score at that point, it takes a little bit of pressure off an edgy sort of game."

Reflecting on the poor quality of the game on a bitterly cold night, Watson said: "It wasn't great! We had a professional performance. We still tried to pass the ball at times. We try to do things right. Players are frustrated because it's a little bit unconventional at times but it's probably not a great spectacle. You wouldn't want to pay to watch it!" It should have been two in the 17th minute when they were awarded a free-kick just outside the penalty area down the left. Edwards played it short to Edgar, who drilled his low right-footed shot against the base of the near post from a tight angle from 15-yards out. "Set-pieces is something that we continue to work on, we've got more settled personnel," added Watson.

The rest of the first half was uninspiring and it took Croydon until 44:04 on the clock to create their first chance. Darrell Austin intercepted a pass inside the final third and he poked the ball through to lone striker Malik Nosike, who drove forward, cut inside and forced Andy Walker to dive low to his right to parry before gathering at the second attempt to deny the five-goal striker from 18-yards. "He's still got to save it hasn't he, but they didn't have much," admitted Watson. "The longer it goes at 1-0 the other team gets a chance and they finish it and it's difficult. It's frustrating, you're on edge a little bit at 1-0, even though we controlled the game and we controlled possession and we did control territory."
"At half-time, they were frustrated, there was actually a little bit of negative energy, not them being negative but just more born of the frustration if you like. "It's important to explain to them that the expectations are high, there's also an understanding of what's going on and they need to understand how we can improve in the second half."

Eight minutes into the second half, N'Guessan cut in from the left, played the ball inside to Edgar, who dinked the ball through to N'Guessan, who from a tight angle was denied by the keeper, who used his knees to make the block at his near post. "He was one-on-one Joe. He probably could've slipped that to Anthony (Edgar) but look he's made that decision trying to be clever but he's a clever player. He's got that sort of ability. It was important to get the second."
Cray Valley won the corner-count 6-3 and Edgar cut their third corner of the night back to Edwards, who drove his right-footed shot sailing over the Croydon crossbar from 30-yards. Edwards cut inside and played the ball low into the box but N'Guessan's deflected shot took the sting out of the shot and trickled into Farrer's gloves. Cray Valley created a great chance to double their lead in the 62nd minute, following their fourth corner of the night.

Edgar floated the ball in from the right and Ashley Sains came up from the back to glance his free-header across goal and sailing past the far post from 12-yards. "He didn't quite get enough contact on it. It was a good ball from Ant and a good run from

Ash. He just didn't get enough purchase on it," added Watson.

Croydon winger Tre Daley was a threat down the right and he played the ball in to the edge of the penalty area for Rolle to curl his shot towards the bottom far corner from 22-yards, forcing Walker to scramble across his goal to tip behind. "It was hard to tell from my angle (if it was going in). It didn't have a lot of pace on it and he's just done the sensible thing Walks," added Watson.

Edgar threw the ball to Edwards, who collected the ball at his feet on the right flank before cutting into the box and his left-footed curler deflected off Adam Flemming and flashed past the far post. Croydon created a half-chance when substitute Richard Pringling played a sublime crossfield pass to put Daley through on goal but he lacked composure inside the box and his shot sailed harmlessly around the far post from 15-yards.

Cray Valley killed off a dead game when they doubled their lead with 31 minutes and 22 seconds on the clock through Babalola's sixteenth goal of the campaign. Cem Tumkaya, who played on the right-hand side of a three-man defence, hit a long ball upfield and Croydon centre-half Cairo Duhaney-Buron's poor back header was seized upon by Babalola, who cut into the box and skipped around the keeper before slotting his shot into the bottom far corner from a tight angle.

Watson said: "He's got lots to do from there. Ok, he's gone around the goalkeeper but it's still a tight angle but look his goals per game ratio is good. We've got a few players who can score goals. It was important to get on the score sheet because a lot of what he's done tonight was about his work-rate so it's good for him to get his reward there."

Croydon attacker Pringling saw a weak shot from 25-yards roll into Walker's hands after some more good play down the right wing from Daley.

Watson made three late changes and they all combined towards the end of a poor game. Ryan Flack released Calum Willock down the right channel and Nathan Palmer's low centre was cut out by Farrer, while on his knees.

The top seven tonight contains Fisher (40 points from 18 games); Beckenham Town (39 points from 19 games); Corinthian (35 points from 17 games); Cray Valley (33 points from 16 games); Deal Town (32 points from 19 games); Chatham Town (31 points from 16 games) and Sheppey United (30 points from 16 games). Cray Valley remain favourites to go on and win the league title and Watson takes his side to resurgent Tunbridge Wells on Saturday.

Wells manager Jason Bourne was in the crowd tonight and his club are in the bottom five with 16 points from as many games.

"We need to try to be up there. We haven't really met these sort of dizzy heights of fourth place in the season so it was important we get up there and we start to challenge. It's a good time to start to try to put a bit of pressure on some others," said Watson on his club's league position. "I think we are very strong in the league. Yes, we are one of the stronger teams but we've lost on Saturday to Deal. Until you get towards the end of the season, it's too tight now for anybody to call.

"Tunbridge Wells have made some good signings. We know a few of them and they're a good team. That will be a really good challenge for us that game. They'll climb the table now. They beat Croydon 5-2 the other day. They've made some good signings, it's a good club. I like a lot of what they do. I like their management, I like some of their players. I know some of their players and we'll go down there and try to have a good game with them."

Croydon: Ryan Farrer, Mohammed Dabo, Samuel Salis, Adam Flemming (Gianni Daley 73), Jamie McGeoghegan, Cairo Duhaney-Burton, Tre Daley, Denzil Rolle, Malik Nosike, Darrell Austin (Richard Pringling 46), Levi Shango.
Subs: Jesse Santemu, James Fotheringham, Adam Ballard

Booked: Mohammed Dabo 47, Gianni Daley 83, Malik Nosike 86

Cray Valley (Paper Mills): Andy Walker, Chris Edwards, Josh James, Ashley Sains, Liam Hickey, Cem Tumkaya, Paul Semukula, Jack White, Francis Babalola (Calum Willock 87), Joe N'Guessan (Nathan Palmer 88), Anthony Edgar (Ryan Flack 87).
Sub: Tommy Osborne

Goals: Anthony Edgar 15, Francis Babalola 77

Attendance: 80

Referee: Mr Peter Conn (Gillingham)

Assistants: Mr Ross Mortimer (Sidcup) & Mr Jordan Crichlow (Carshalton, Surrey)