

## **FC ELMSTEAD 2-2 CRAY VALLEY (PAPER MILLS)**

**Pre-Season Friendly**

**Tuesday 9 July 2019**

**Stephen McCartney reports from Queen Mary University Sports Ground**

### **CRAY VALLEY (Paper Mills) manager Kevin Watson says he will discuss his side's performance at training on Thursday night after falling short against a spirited FC Elmstead.**

The Millers are preparing for their debut Isthmian League South East Division campaign after winning the Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division title by a point last season and suffering a heart-breaking [3-1 extra time defeat to Chertsey Town in The Buildbase FA Vase Final at Wembley Stadium on Sunday 19 May 2019](#).

Cray Valley opened their pre-season campaign with a 3-0 win over Glebe, while FC Elmstead thrashed Elite Performance SET 7-0 on Saturday.

FC Elmstead had stand-in goalkeeper Ben Hyde to thank as he made a string of saves during the game to frustrate Watson's men.

FC Elmstead finished in the bottom six in the Southern Counties East Football League First Division last season and they took the lead through Ashley Bertrand's superb volley.

Cray Valley swiftly equalised through striker Francis Babalola, before 28-year-old former Kent Football United striker Bertrand chipped in his second of the game to give Ennio Gonnella's side the lead.

Cray Valley dominated the later stages of the game and deservedly equalised with just seven minutes remaining through central midfielder Emiliano Hysi, who finished last season playing Suburban League football for National League club Bromley.

"Not sure yet, if I'm honest. I think I just need to go away and digest it. I'm not speaking to (the players') now, I'll speak to them on Thursday about it," said Watson.

"I felt they (FC Elmstead) were very good, very good, very energetic, organised, tried to play the right way. In that sense it was a good game.

"It is what it is, it's a pre-season friendly! If I turned round and say it doesn't matter, it does because you have to get a winning mentality, so it's important to win these games from that perspective.

"We're still learning about some of the new players and they're learning about the way we play. There's always stuff to take out of games, definitely.

"I'm not annoyed, I'm not angry. I'm not happy. It's similar to when we played Glebe on Saturday. It was a better performance, we won 3-0. We didn't come out of that ecstatic. It's a pre-season friendly, we've got eight games, this is the second one and we just build and try to get things right."

FC Elmstead assistant manager Gerry Gonnella was sent out by his brother Ennio for post-match press duties.

"Very good for the boys, worked hard to be fair to them. They played like it was a cup final. They worked their socks off. They have been for the last week and a half so if they can carry that into the season, I think we'll be alright," said Gerry Gonnella.

"We saw a lot about them as individuals and as a team. The new team has been together for a week and a half and they showed great spirit and togetherness and they can have that mentality going forwards, then it's brilliant for us and them."

This game was played at the Queen Mary University Sports Ground on Perry Street in Chislehurst, adjacent to Glebe's Foxbury Avenue ground.

FC Elmstead took just 94 seconds to create their first opening, as Cray Valley maintained their three centre-halves and two wing-backs that worked so well for them last season.

Lone striker Bertrand played the ball out to right-back Russell Carter-Thompson, who had advanced into the Millers half of the pitch and he played the ball into Sesay but Antonio Gonnella failed to keep his right-footed drive down from a couple of yards outside the penalty area.

"It was a good bit of play, unlucky not to score to be honest but he is capable of it. Last season he did a couple of times," said Gonnella.

"It was frustrating at times today being a player because you haven't got the ball as much as you like against a team like Cray Valley."

Dave Martin, who was playing National League South football for Eastbourne Borough last season, slipped the ball through to Denzel Gayle, who skipped past centre-half Jordan Anderson, who kept both of his arms behind his back to prevent giving away a handball. Gayle teed up Anthony Edgar, whose low left-footed shot from 12-yards was comfortably saved by Hyde.

Martin lost the ball to Sesay inside the Cray Valley half of the field and the ball was cut back to left-back Ahmed Deen, who played the ball inside to Axell, who lost composure when space opened up in front of him by slicing his 35-yard effort harmlessly wide.

FC Elmstead switched off following a quickly-taken corner in the 20<sup>th</sup> minute when Martin rolled their first corner back to Sammoutis, who was given space to drive in a low shot into Hyde's grasp from 15-yards.

Cray Valley were denied the opening goal in the 26<sup>th</sup> minute when the talented Sammoutis pinged a quality ball over the top to release Gayle down the right. He was given space to float in a deep cross which was hit on the volley by left-wing-back Danny Smith. The shot was charged down by the outstanding Prescott-Kerr and clipped the near post.

FC Elmstead put in a spirited performance and it had a League Cup feel to the game, with the lower league side wanting to cause an upset.

They produced a good move down the right with Gonnella, Carter-Thompson and Haughton linking up well. Gonnella put in a lovely cross but Axell steered his free header over the crossbar from 10-yards.

Cray Valley were thwarted again in the 33<sup>rd</sup> minute when Martin played the ball into the always impressive Gayle, who cut inside and fed Babalola, whose right-footed drive from 22-yards was brilliantly saved by Hyde, who got down low to his left (the wrong way) and stuck out his right leg to make a vital block.

Gonnella said: "He's actually our original goalkeeper's cousin! Alex Hyde is on holiday, he's like 'my cousin can play' and we're like 'oh gosh!' He's brought him in - let's sign him up! I thought he was brilliant!"

"Some of the saves he pulled off today were brilliant! He's still young as well I believe. I'm sure he'll have a future somewhere."

Watson added: "I thought he made loads of good saves their goalkeeper to be fair, I thought he done really well."

Hyde made a more comfortable save just 22 seconds later, letting the ball bounce a couple of times before gathering Edgar's right-footed drive from 25-yards, but neither side could find a goal during the first half.

Watson said: "I just said to them, you probably heard what I said to them at half-time. It's important to not bombard them with lots of smaller details, it was just about getting some key points that they try to develop in the second half, rather than go through lots and lots of bits.

"Those key points were can we be more patient in the final third second half? I thought we was a little bit and defensively can we stop them switching the ball as much? So two things we spoke about time and time again last season, so I feel they applied a little bit better second half."

Gonnella added: "I was really impressed! A team like Cray Valley you have to accept you're not going to have the ball as much but then again we won't lose as much possession in our league like that but we kept our shape, we worked our socks off and the talking was brilliant. I was really impressed, very, very impressed!"

The game exploded into life when Cray Valley keeper Andy Walker made a superb save to prevent winger Marcus Cassius sliding his shot into the bottom right-hand corner from inside the six-yard box after a lovely through ball from half-time substitute Jerome Walker.

FC Elmstead took the lead from the resulting corner, the goal being timed at five minutes and six seconds on the clock.

Gonnella swung in a deep corner from the left which picked out an unmarked Bertrand, who smacked his left-footed volley back across Walker to find the bottom far corner.

Goals like this from the former Kent Football United striker and Bertrand will be playing at a higher level of football – and the same goes with heroic keeper Hyde.

Gonnella said: "What a finish! He's been with us a week and a half. The drills we've done in training, his finishing has been unreal. He's actually come as a striker but we thought second half we'll try him as a winger and it paid off to be honest."

Watson added: "A really good technique, a good strike. Obviously, he's unmarked at the back but it was a good goal from their perspective. I applauded it, it was a good goal."

Cray Valley showed great character to force an equaliser, with eight seconds and a second on the clock.

Smith played the ball into Babalola, who placed his low right-footed drive past the stranded Hyde from 20-yards.

Watson said: "A good strike. It's something that we're working on still, different type of finishes with him. He scored two goals against Glebe the other day. He scored a good goal today so he can finish. It's just getting into those positions where he's experiencing different types of finishes in training."

Gonnella added: "It was a great finish! That's the sort of player they've got there, certain individuals that were just unbelievable to be honest, a great finish, unstoppable!"

Hyde pulled off another brilliant save to prevent Cray Valley grabbing the lead.

Substitute attacked Kweku Ansah – who was playing for Phoenix Sports last season – whipped in a cross from the right, the ball took a wicked deflection of Anderson at the near post and was heading for the top near corner, only for Hyde to tip the ball over the crossbar, diving high to his left.

Millers' first choice keeper Walker was substituted and within a couple of minutes his replacement Tommy Taylor was beaten by another fine goal from Bertrand.

Axell played the ball into the striker, who struck a left-footed shot on the turn from 30-yards, which looped over the keeper's head and dropped down into the roof of the net. The goal was timed at 13 minutes and 35 seconds.

Gonnella said: "Like I said, he's capable of it. He's been doing it since he's come into training and it was a brilliant finish!"

Watson admitted: "Poor defending from us but credit to the lad, he's got to execute that."

Taylor told Watson that he is unavailable to train with the club on Thursday night.

"I haven't discussed that (his future) with him yet so I can't really discuss it with you. We haven't had that conversation," revealed Watson.

"He's come in and played on Saturday and he's played some minutes today. He hasn't trained with us yet, hopefully he'll train with us and then I'll have that conversation with him."

Cray Valley pressed for an equaliser and were denied by another fine save from Hyde, who used his legs to prevent Ansah from scoring from a tight angle after being put through on goal by Babalola's fine pass.

Martin played a short corner with Gayle and Martin swung in a cross towards the near post, which was glanced towards goal by centre-half Cem Tumkaya, which sailed across Hyde and was destined for the far corner, only to be cleared off the line by Elmstead's left-back Deen.

Prescott-Kerr kept throwing his body in the way of the ball and it felt like FC Elmstead were going to pull off a shock win over a side that are now two levels higher.

Gayle continued to probe the FC Elmstead back-line and teed up Hysi but his left-footed drive was gathered by Hyde at the second attempt beside his left-hand post.

Cray Valley central midfielder Matthew Warren drove straight down the middle of the pitch before playing the ball on his outside to Ansah, who drilled his right-footed shot across the stranded keeper and past the far post.

It was one way traffic and Hyde had an outstanding game and on tonight's evidence needs to be signed up.

He got down low to his left to prevent Hysi's swept shot nestling into the bottom right-hand corner after Ansah and Gayle dominated a tired Deen down the right.

The deserved equaliser finally arrived from the resulting corner, the goal being timed at 37 minutes and 48 seconds on the clock.

Martin swung the ball in and there were plenty of bodies inside the box but Hysi's shot from the edge of the box took a wicked deflection and looped over Hyde before dropping into the bottom far corner.

"He scored a great goal against Glebe the other day and he's scored again today and he said that's an important part of his game," revealed Watson.

"Look, he'll get more minutes over pre-season and we'll have more of a look at him. It's both parties. Does it work for him? Does it work for us? Will we be able to satisfy his football needs? Will he be able to satisfy ours? Ultimately, he's a really good lad, very enthusiastic, good mindset."

Gonnella added: "Lindsey Prescott-Kerr was brilliant, as was Jordan Anderson. They were brilliant together. They've never met each other before this and they just clicked straight away.

"We was under pressure a lot of the last 20 minutes or so but we thought it was going to happen at some stage because the boys started to tire. We didn't have a lot of subs as we wanted, we've still got a couple of people out injured or on holiday so the boys done well because a lot of them had their first 90 minutes today.

"The goal was coming, they did have quite a few chances. I know Emiliano from Dulwich Hamlet so I know what

he's capable of. He's a good little player, especially if you give him time, which he punished us for."

The dominating Millers continued to press for the winner. Hysi played a crossfield ball to put Martin through on goal, taking a touch to control the ball before driving a low left-footed shot which was blocked by Hyde's legs as he narrowed down the angle.

Martin's penultimate corner was worked to Tumkaya at the far post and his low shot towards the bottom far corner was cleared off the line by towering centre-half Anderson.

Martin reached the by-line before whipping in a cross which was met by a sliding Warren, who flicked his shot over the keeper's left shoulder and clearing the crossbar as he aimed for the top far corner from the edge of the six-yard box.

Referee Gary Thomas blew for full-time immediately after Warren glanced his free header across goal and past the far post after Martin swung in their 12<sup>th</sup> and final corner in from the right.

Watson said: "I want to win games. I wanted to win that today. People can have different mindsets. I'm disappointed we didn't win. I always say, I look at the performance as well and I've got some opinions on the performance and I'll relay them to the players on Thursday. We haven't got a game on Saturday so we can train, which is nice and we'll have a hard session on Thursday and then we've got Carshalton Athletic (away) which will be a tough test on Monday.

"Our philosophy is our philosophy. The way we tried to play from an offensive and defensive perspective and that got us some success last year. The players' from last season that stayed can they be better because they will need to be better because we're going up a level.

"I want that understanding and that calibration and that team ethic because we had to go into every game last season to win it so we need to have that mentality again."

Notable absentees were strike pair Gavin Tomlin (17 goals) and Kevin Lisbie (26 goals) but Watson is keen to keep them at the promoted club.

"Conversations are still taking place. You have to respect people to be able to assess things before having those conversations but I wouldn't put my house on either of them never playing for us again but we have to evolve. I've got players at the moment that weren't here tonight but never say never with things.

"They're both very good players and to a certain extent the door remains open for certain players but we still have to go and plan.

"Is the squad complete? No, the squad is not complete. I'm still looking for certainly one, maybe two players. Will I get that one or two players I don't know. I'm not going to rush to sign anybody. I'm still looking at some. Kweku Ansah done well when he's come on and yes we'll see."

FC Elmstead were only seven minutes away from producing an upset and Gonnella wants his players to replicate this heart and desire when their league campaign gets underway, especially as the top four club's seal promotion into the Premier Division.

"The mentality impressed us so much. To have that mentality and that ambition to win in a pre-season friendly, I think if you could have that throughout pre-season and bring that into your season, you're setting yourself up for something so for me the mentality was brilliant and that's what I take out of it.

"For a team that have been together for a week and a half, it's certainly showing good signs.

"I did want (the scalp of beating Cray Valley) under our belt to be fair. I know they don't count much in pre-season but it does send some sort of message out to the whole league because I've been saying it to these lot

being like the silent team, when no-ones talking about them, you just creep up and hopefully go for promotion and that's our plan.

"We're not doing much talking or publicity on social media, we're just keeping quiet ourselves. If we kept on to the 2-1 win that would've been a great confidence boost."

**FC Elmstead: Ben Hyde, Russell Carter-Thompson, Ahmed Deen, Alimm Sesay, Lindsey Prescott-Kerr, Shaqkeem Haughton (Jerome Walker 46), Mark Axell (Kieran Burrell 63), Ashley Bertrand (James Paull 70), Antonio Gonnella (Christian Howell 52), Marcus Cassius (Dominic Weston 79).**

**Sub: Alfie Young**

**Goals: Ashley Bertrand 51, 59**

**Cray Valley (Paper Mills): Andy Walker (Tommy Taylor 57), Denzel Gayle, Danny Smith, Cem Tumkaya, Liam Hickey, Geoffrey Okonkwo (Kalvin Morath-Gibbs 48), Anthony Edgar (Kweku Ansah 48), Matthew Warren, Francis Babalola (Steve Karkori 66), Dave Martin, Jack Sammoutis (Emiliano Hysi 48).**

**Goals: Francis Babalola 54, Emiliano Hysi 83**

**Booked: Anthony Edgar 47**

**Attendance: 45**

**Referee: Mr Gary Thomas**

**Assistants: Mr Darren Kempson & Mr Tyrone Behari**