

CRAY VALLEY (PAPER MILLS) 3-1 BAFFINS MILTON ROVERS
The Buildbase FA Vase Fourth Round
Saturday 5 January 2019
Stephen McCartney reports from Middle Park Avenue

CRAY VALLEY (Paper Mills) manager Kevin Watson says his players have got a real opportunity to progress in The Buildbase FA Vase after comfortably booking their place in the last sixteen. Portsmouth based side Baffins Milton Rovers were comfortably beaten 3-1 despite being in fifth-place in the Sydenhams Wessex League table with 31 points from 16 games, while the Millers were in fifth-place in the Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division table with 37 points from 19 games.



Cray Valley have reached The FA Vase Last 16 for the first time in their history following their comfortable 3-1 win over Baffins Milton Rovers.
Photo: Frank May - Cray Valley FC

Cray Valley opened the scoring four minutes before half-time with striker Francis Babalola slotting in his

17th goal of the season. Star-striker Kevin Lisbie, 40, doubled their lead with his 21st goal of the season early in the second half before winger Denzel Gayle headed in his 13th goal of the season. Anthony Edgar blasted a penalty high over the crossbar and into the allotments behind the ground, before Steve Leigh's side pulled a goal back through Jason Parish's penalty with three minutes left.

The Millers have defeated Sutton Athletic (2-1); Hailsham Town (2-); St Pantelemon (3-1 after the first game was abandoned in extra-time with the score locked at 1-1); Badshot Lea (7-0) and Sheppey United (4-0).

Watson was without defenders Ashley Sains (holiday); injured pair Liam Hickey and Brad Potter and right-back Chris Edwards was cup-tied. Danny Smith (left), Cem Tumkaya (centre) and Tyler Myers (right) were deployed as centre-halves with Josh James (left) and Gayle deployed as wing-backs. Watson said: "I've got no doubt they're a good side, I said that before. They've done very well. I've seen a video of them, I didn't get a chance to actually go and watch them, which I was frustrated about because the game was called off that I was going to go to. "Look, to beat a team like that fairly convincingly - I don't think that's doing an injustice - is obviously pleasing, especially considering we had five players unavailable today.

"I think it will be harsh to say it was a makeshift backline but it was certainly one that hadn't played together in those positions. You've got to have faith in your players haven't you? If you've got players at the club and they're going to be part of it you've got to have the confidence that they're going to come in and play in different positions to do that professional job and if not they shouldn't be at the club. "But the amount of changes in one part of the team was the concern."

Cray Valley dominated the majority of this game and should have won by more goals. They created their first opening inside the opening eight minutes. Edgar floated a free-kick into the Baffins Milton Rovers' penalty area and an unmarked Gayle smacked his volley across goal and past the far post from 15-yards. Gayle's hooked ball over the top sailed over Baffins Milton Rovers' centre-half Ashton Leigh and put Lisbie through on goal but he swept his right-footed shot across the keeper and past the far post from 15-yards when he only had Cameron Scott to beat. Watson said: "I wouldn't say they were clear-cut chances and a few tested the goalkeeper a little bit. It was a little bit frustrating, kicking up the slope a little bit, but we did create a few."

Cray Valley keeper Andy Walker was hardly tested. He had the simple task of gathering a bouncing ball after central midfielder Jamie White got on the end of Ashton Leigh's free-kick towards the edge of the penalty area and guided his header into the hands of the 37-year-old.

The Millers won the corner-count by 9-3 and Tumkaya found a pocket of space inside the penalty area to guide his free header straight into Scott's hands after meeting Edgar's outswinging corner from the right. "I thought we looked quite threatening from some set-pieces today," added Watson. Scott had a great game for the visitors and he used his left leg to make a vital block to deny Edgar from scoring from 12-yards in the 21st minute and Watson was full of praise for the visiting keeper.

"I thought he done well. I don't think he played the last game for them ironically. I don't know how many games he's played this season but I thought he done well in the first half." Edgar's second corner of the game wasn't cleared by the away side and the ball fell at Ryan Flack's feet inside the box and he swept his shot across the keeper, dragging it past the far post from 12-yards out, as another chance went begging.

"I knew we would get chances the longer the game went on so that weren't so much of a concern," admitted Watson. "But the more chances you get and you're not scoring them and the other team aren't getting chances, you think if they get that one chance (they'll score) which has happened against us a few times this season."

Cray Valley linked up well and Edgar fed the ball into Lisbie's feet in the middle before he played the ball out to Edgar and his first time cross from the right was met by Babalola's free-header from 12-yards, which looped over the crossbar. Visiting keeper Scott was rooted to the spot as Babalola stroked a deflected shot past the foot of the left-hand post as dominant Cray Valley missed another chance in the 29th minute.

Baffins Milton Rovers' central midfielder Harry Wedlake took a blow to the nose and was temporarily off the pitch receiving treatment by the time that Tumkaya rose at the far post to glance his header wide after meeting Edgar's fifth corner of the afternoon.

Cray Valley finally made the breakthrough and took the lead with 40 minutes and 45 seconds on the clock, courtesy of another fine move. Gayle played the ball in from the right into Babalola who played Gayle in behind the defence and his shot was parried by Scott, diving low to his right and Lisbie and Babalola were queuing up inside the box and it was Babalola's task of placing his shot into the bottom right-hand corner from eight-yards. Watson said: "He should've had a few more than that today so I'm going to be on his case a little bit but no, a good finish at an important time to get a goal," said Watson. "Francis has got a really good goal to game ratio. He should've had more. He frustrates us a little, a few of our players do and he's got lots of ability but what is important he's still learning the game. I think it's really important for him to be at this club because we're willing to educate him even more."

The Millers created their last chance of a dominant first half when Myers delivered a deep cross from the half-way line for Lisbie to jump his man to guide his header into Scott's hands. "At half-time we needed to reflect on why we were good in the first half, what got us to 1-0," said Watson. "Complacency, I know it's a cliché word, but it's one that springs to mind. It's one I mentioned in there. I don't like complacency. They knew they were playing quite well so it was about keeping a lid on it and making sure they can do that again in the second half."

The Millers set the tone and created their first opening of the second half after only 51 seconds. Smith floated in a free-kick towards the penalty spot for Lisbie to plant his header across goal and harmlessly wide. But Lisbie produced a classy finish to increase Cray Valley's lead by scoring with three minutes and 38 seconds on the clock. It was a counter-attack of plenty of pace as Gayle released Edgar, who sprinted down the line and cut the ball back towards an unmarked Lisbie and he swept his first time shot past Scott to find the bottom right-hand corner from 12-yards.



**Cray Valley's players celebrate Kevin Lisbie's goal against Baffins Milton Rovers.
Photo: Alan Coomes**

"It was a good bit of play actually," said Watson. "We won the ball down the line, it was a nice one-two with Denzel and Anthony and good vision by Anthony. Nice pace and set, just a great finish. "Look, we nearly brought Kevin Lisbie off before half-time because he had an injury and we said 'do you want to carry on?' He was struggling and all fairness to him for carrying on but it was a great finish, great composure."

Cray Valley's impressive brand of football tore their opponents apart and all they could do was make around four cynical fouls in a poor attempt to stop them. Smith clipped a ball over the top to release Gayle sprinting down the left and he put it on a plate for Edgar, whose first time shot from 10-yards was superbly saved by Scott. "In all fairness to him but they should score, the forward should be the favourite in those positions," came Watson's reply. "We should've put the game out of sight and that's what frustrates me. We wanted to keep a clean sheet. We should be in a position that I want to make substitutions and feel relatively relaxed. I don't think that was the case until right until the death."

The away side created an opening in the 12th minute when right-back Aaron Grimshaw launched a long diagonal from the half-way line and was met by winger Fedel Seibou and his shot sailed over Walker's left-shoulder and only just cleared the crossbar as he aimed for the top far corner.

But Cray Valley raced into a three-goal lead with 18 minutes and 35 seconds on the clock. Edgar ignored Watson's instructions and drilled a right-footed free-kick from 30-yards, which crashed back down the underside of the crossbar and Gayle had the desire to be at the right place at the right time to head the ball over the line from inside the six-yard box. Watson said: "We half knew he was going to shoot but I was telling him not to actually! I told him to do something else but he didn't listen to me! It's a great strike. There's so much pace and dip and power on the strike and Denzel's done really well finishing up there. "Denzel didn't have loads of chances himself but created quite a lot and he's always a threat."

Grimshaw, who was already on a booking, escaped further punishment after he fouled Calum Willock inside the box after the substitute striker latched onto Edgar's through ball. Edgar stepped up and drilled his right-footed penalty high over the crossbar and into the allotments with 23 minutes and 58 seconds on the clock. "Calum done well to get the penalty," said Watson. "He's come on and he's worked hard. Calum doesn't complain. It's good to have people like that. He hasn't had a lot of minutes recently. He hasn't been available for some midweek games due to work. He's done really well when he came on, worked hard.

"Yes, it's a poor penalty, it's a poor penalty. He should've scored. He knows he should've scored. I've got no sympathy for people who miss penalties but he should score, no matter which stage of the game. It's a poor penalty but people miss penalties at the higher level don't they at all stages of the game but he should score!"

Baffins Milton Rovers striker Parish smashed a 35-yard half-volley which Walker dropped to his knees to spill before grabbing hold of the loose ball. "Good technique. He caused Walks a little bit of mischief there. Walks has done everything right though. He's just hit it into the ground and close to him," said Watson.

The Millers missed another chance inside the 15 minutes when James hooked pass released Willock down the left and he played the ball inside to Edgar, who twisted and turned his man on the edge of the box before cutting the ball on his left foot to drill his shot over the crossbar. Despite Walker demanding a clean sheet from his new-look back-three, Baffins Milton Rovers scored a consolation goal from the penalty spot with 41 minutes and 8 seconds on the clock.

Tyler Yates hit a long ball forward from the half-way line and Myers had a chance to clear his lines but he tried to be clever and lost out to Parish before tripping the big targetman inside the box and referee Elliott Kaye pointed to the spot. Parish drilled his right-footed penalty straight down the middle as Walker dived to his left. Speaking about Myers' only piece of poor defending, Watson said: "He'll be disappointed with himself there Tyler. I thought he was excellent today but part of the job is those key moments isn't it? As a defender you need to defend first and foremost and I think he tried to overplay it and not deal with it quickly enough in the right way, which he did in the majority of the game. "Look, we talk about forwards missing chances and it's similar, they're similar errors but a defenders one seem more costly."

Any slender hope of the away side grabbing something from the game was quickly extinguished as Cray Valley finished the game as they spent the vast majority of it – on the front foot. Babalola sprinted down the right with the ball, cut into the penalty area and dragged his shot across goal and past the far post. Willock's hooked pass released Paul Semakula, who rode Grimshaw's sliding tackle before the holding midfielder drilled his shot past the post. The impressive James then released Babalola through on goal and he was denied by a fine save from Scott, who dived low to get fingertips to the ball to ensure the ball trickled past the foot of the right-hand post at the end of the game.

Watson said: "Francis should've done better there. Look, he's very honest, a very good player, a great lad but like I say he's still at the age where he can develop aspects of his game. He's scored a lot of goals so some of his finishes are excellent. Those ones he will work on and he will work on."

Cray Valley have proved throughout this FA Vase campaign that they are good enough to go all the way to the Wembley Stadium Final in May – and win it! Watson said: "We keep our cards relatively close to our chest in terms of the conversations that go on with the players and what we say in the changing room and things like that but I've got a good understanding. I feel from conversation with players about their aspirations and their motivations and I think it's important for us to discuss."

"I think it's important that they never know what their highlight in football is going to be and I didn't as a player. I think my most memorable moment was in a cup competition and at the time I probably took it for granted a little bit. You assume there's going to be more of those moments, there's not always as long and they recognise that and as long as they understand that this is a really good opportunity to progress even further in this competition. But the further you go, the harder it's going to get. It's like any cup competition because the better teams are going to be in it."

Cray Valley can end up playing anywhere in England in the Fifth Round on Saturday 2 February as the competition now goes national. "I'd rather it not be here! I'd rather it be on a better surface somewhere if I'm completely honest, a pitch like Beckenham, Sheppey and Rusthall," said Watson. "We don't mind travelling if we're travelling somewhere nice, we'll travel. "I'd love to get through to the Semi-Finals purely because it's over two legs and I think you have to back yourselves over two legs."

"We'll enjoy today. I'm really pleased for the people at the club, people who work tirelessly and I won't mention each and everyone of them but the committee who do a lot of things at this club that goes on behind the scenes. It's hard and a daily grind so it's for them and the players and the players' families and the supporters we get and the extended committee etc and it's a moment these people can share."

Cray Valley (Paper Mills): Andy Walker, Denzel Gayle, Josh James, Cem Tumkaya, Tyler Myers, Danny Smith, Ryan Flack (Jack White 81), Paul Semakula, Francis Babalola, Kevin Lisbie (Calum Willock 66), Anthony Edgar (Glenn Clarke 84).

Subs: Tommy Osborne, Joe N'Guessan

Goals: Francis Babalola 41, Kevin Lisbie 49, Denzel Gayle 64

Baffins Milton Rovers: Cameron Scott, Aaron Grimshaw, Josh Dean (Freeman Williams 51), Harry Wedlake, Ashton Leigh, Tyler Yates, Fedal Seibou, Jamie White, Jason Parish, Tommy Tierney (Max Paddon 59), Rob Taw.

Subs: Corey Burns, Callum Dart, Owen Haly

Goal: Jason Parish 87 (penalty)

Booked: Tyler Yates 37, Aaron Grimshaw 60, Harry Wedlake 77

Attendance: 139

Referee: Mr Elliott Kaye (Loughton, Essex)

Assistants: Mr Jack Hobbs (Brighton, East Sussex) & Mr Matthew Goldsmith (Hastings, East Sussex)

Fourth Official: Mr Dean Markwick (Romford, Essex)