

## **SHEPPEY UNITED 0-4 CRAY VALLEY (PAPER MILLS)**

**The Buildbase FA Vase Third Round**

**Saturday 1 December 2018**

**Stephen McCartney reports from Holm Park**

**CRAY VALLEY (Paper Mills) manager Kevin Watson says he wants the club to reimburse his family scouting trip so he can watch their next opponents in the last 32 of The Buildbase FA Vase after thrashing Sheppey United at Holm Park.**

With Sheppey United goalkeeper Aaron Lee-Wharton, 19, bravely playing despite a suffering a broken nose and concussion inside the opening four minutes, Cray Valley rattled in their four goals during the final 23 minutes.

Francis Babalola drilled in his 15<sup>th</sup> goal of the season to send them on their way, before Joe N'Guessan notched two goals in 11 minutes to take his tally up to 12 for the season, before Anthony Edgar dinked in his 16<sup>th</sup> goal of the season.

The Millers were in fourth-place in the Southern Counties East Football League Premier Division table with 30 points on the board from 14 games, while Sheppey United were a place lower with 30 points from 15 league outings.

Sheppey United have beaten Balham (3-1); Seaford United (5-3); East Preston (4-0) and Spelthorne Sports (2-1) and have now banked £3,375 in prize money.

Cray Valley have beaten Sutton Athletic (2-1); Hailsham Town (2-0); St Panteleimon (3-1 after an abandonment in extra-time with the original tie locked at 1-1) and a 7-0 win at Badshot Lea was a record score line and have banked £4,125 in prize money.

"Pleased to progress through to the next round, generally pleased with the performance," said Watson.

"Sheppey are a good team so it's pleasing to beat them. They conducted themselves extremely well and I've got a lot of time for their manager with the way they do things and I've got a good relationship with him.

"But one team has got to go through. In a cup competition the score line is irrelevant as long as you end up winning the game. It took us a while to break them down but having said that in the first 10-15 minutes we had some chances but we were wasteful, which was frustrating!"

Sheppey United manager Ernie Batten said: "It was an odd game for us today. I think we started not too bad but the injury to the goalkeeper was very disruptive. We couldn't seem to settle although we got to half-time 0-0.

"Second half they got their first goal in the 67<sup>th</sup> minute so we were in the game up until then and I thought first half, although they had pressure and they had a couple of chances, especially with the goalkeeper being injured. I felt that we had some chances. We hit the post, it came back out and hit the back of the goalkeeper. I think we've got a nice few crosses in that might have gone our way. It didn't fall for us today in front of goal."

Cray Valley started the game on the front foot and after 90 seconds left-back Danny Smith released Kevin Lisbie charging down the left and his pace got him past David Botterill before he centred for Edgar, but he sliced his shot out towards the touchline than the goal from just inside the Sheppey United penalty area.

Edgar played a free-kick down the right-hand side of the penalty area for Lisbie and his angled drive was parried by Lee-Wharton and N'Guessan blazed his shot high over the crossbar as the ball rolled out to him on the edge of the penalty area.

Play was halted for seven minutes to allow both physio's to treat Lee-Wharton, who suffered a hit to the face after holding midfielder Luke Girt ran into him.

Lee-Wharton was visibly shaken but he pulled off several fine saves to frustrate the Millers.

"He was in a bad way really. He's done fantastic to get through the game," said Batten.

"Players today, I believe, maybe I'm a bit old school but they're quick to (complain about) all these different types of injuries they get now. I think in my day the metatarsal was a bruised toe but it's called a metatarsal injury now!

"That was a proper injury, our centre-half Luke Girt ran into him, caught his lip, the bridge of his nose. He was a fair weight but full credit to the lad, he's managed to get through the game."

Ashley Sains clipped a long ball over the top to put Lisbie through on goal and his sweetly struck half-volley forced Lee-Wharton to dive to his left to tip the ball behind for a corner in the 12<sup>th</sup> minute.

"When he's gone through, things weren't falling for us. We were wasteful but players of that calibre usually finish those chances as they did towards the end," said Watson.

"The pace and the strength and the anticipation, he's hit it cleanly, it's quite hard because it's coming up at that height but the goalkeeper's made some great saves in the first half."

Batten added: "I've got him in from Ashford, he wasn't playing there and he's got better as the season's gone on with the number of games that he's playing. He's got a bit of confidence and he's a brave, young goalkeeper.

"When you're playing a side of Cray's quality, they're going to have chances and it's how you meet those chances and how you play yourself. We knew what they're going to do. They've got good quality going forward and they're always going to create."

Lisbie played Edgar in behind Kwasi Amoah and David Botterill but his driven shot nestled into the base of the side netting and Batten decided to put Girt beside William Thomas in the heart of defence, while Botterill moved further up the pitch in midfield.

Cray Valley missed a great chance to take the lead in the 28<sup>th</sup> minute following their third corner of the game.

Edgar swung in the ball from the right and centre-half Liam Hickey found a pocket of space at the near post inside the six-yard box but he planted his free header over the crossbar.

"It's a tough one. He scored the other week with a header against Beckenham so it's good that he's getting on the end of them," Watson said.

But Sheppey United finished the remainder of the first half on the front foot.

Chris Edwards linked up well with Rob Denness and whipped in a great cross from the right which was poked first time by winger Connor Westney from 10-yards, but it was straight at Andy Walker, who made a comfortable save.

"I think today the first goal, cliché, the first goal is important but I think in this type of cup game today that first goal was critical and we had those few opportunities and on another day maybe one or two of them go in," admitted Batten.

Watson added: "They did have a spell, it was tough for us. Look, we know they were going to be a handful with Bradshaw and Rob Denness up top. They're top quality strikers, both could be playing at a higher level so they were always going to be a handful but deliveries from their right-hand-side were threatening."

Sheppey United went agonisingly close to grabbing a 32<sup>nd</sup> minute lead and once again their right-back Edwards played in another great cross.

It landed at Denness feet in a central position inside the D but his right-footed swept shot bounced against the inside of the left-hand post and trickled towards the goal-line but Walker recovered swiftly to pounce on the ball at the last moment.

Batten said: "Sometimes they say your names on the cup and when it's on the cup those ones go in!"

Watson added: "Look ok, it probably is a little bit of luck. It hit the post, good reactions from Walks, it's not luck when he dives, turns round and stops it on the line!"

There was more concern for keeper Lee-Wharton immediately after Edwards failed to keep a drilled shot down from 35-yards. It was evident that the Sheppey United keeper wasn't in a fit state to be out on the pitch and he should have been substituted and replaced by an outfield player.

Dominant Sheppey United should have done better following their first of seven corners.

Hit deep and in from the right by Batten, centre-half William Thomas rose at the far post to plant his header over the crossbar.

Cray Valley right-back Cem Tumkaya was relieved to see his sliced clearance sail just past his own goal and behind for a corner – only just though!

Batten swung in the resulting corner from the left and Botterill found space at the far post and his best option would have been to knock the header back from where it came. Instead, he planted the ball high over the top of the near post.

N'Guessan curled a left-footed shot from 22-yards into Lee-Wharton's hands for a comfortable save – before Cray Valley keeper Walker pulled off a world-class save at the end of first half stoppage time.

Denness and Batten linked up in the final third and played the ball to Edwards, who moved inside the pitch rather than hugging the right touch-line.

He cut the ball onto his right-boot and from 35-yards out drilled a stunning strike which was destined to scream into the top left-hand corner – but Walker dived high to his right and used a strong hand to push the ball over the crossbar.

Batten said: "Fantastic save! I think now we're talking about those chances and it makes me feel that opportunity was in that first half where we could've gone a goal in front. It could've been even. On our day if it would've gone for us, then maybe we could've gone in at half-time in front."

"Incredible save! We talk about certain players and age and things like that but that's agility that's got him that save," said Watson.

"That's as good as a great goal, isn't it? In terms of the job the goalkeeper has got to do, somebody scores a great goal, it's remembered but I think they video their games so I'm sure he'll put it into his collection with all the other saves that he's made in his career!"

Both managers were asked their thoughts at the interval.

Batten said: "I thought I was a bit critical. We could've been tighter in certain areas but we were carrying a couple of players. We had to play a midfield player (Girt) at centre-half today (switching Botterill) and then I had to switch it during the game because it wasn't working. We gave them too much space and I just said to them we've weathered a bit of a storm."

"Aaron was still feeling very groggy and I said 'Aaron carry on and keep it together', play for the first goal and we'll have a great chance – I'm not always right!"

Watson said: "They were frustrated to be honest. Heads were down a little bit in the changing room so it was about trying to pick them up."

"We said about trying to be patient but I thought we got that in the second half. I thought we came out relatively sharp and people started doing the things that we were asking tactically and I think we saw the results of that."

Lee-Wharton was called into action inside the opening 10 minutes of the second half, kicking the ball away as Lisbie charged towards him down the left-hand side of the penalty area after latching onto Edgar's pass.

Lee-Wharton pulled off another great save in the 61<sup>st</sup> minute as Cray Valley started to knock on the door.

Edgar swung in a free-kick from 35-yards and the ball landed at N'Guessan's feet some 12-yards from goal. He placed his right-footed shot towards the bottom right-hand corner, only for the Sheppey keeper to dive to his left to get a strong hand to the shot to turn it behind for a corner.

"We had to keep plugging away, we knew in those conditions (wet and windy) we've got to get shots off on target, it's hard for the goalkeepers."

Cray Valley kept patient and kept plugging away and they were rewarded when they deservedly took the lead with 21 minutes and 44 seconds on the clock.

Jack White was inside the Sheppey half when he drove a lovely 30-yard pass along the pristine playing surface over to an unmarked Babalola. His control was sublime, trapping the ball excellently before drilling his right-footed shot past Lee-Wharton to find the bottom near corner from 10-yards.

"It was a good finish, a really difficult angle to finish from," said Watson.

"It felt a bit of relief if I'm honest. It would give us the confidence to go and get another one."

Batten added: "Some quality, you've got to be very tight with these players because they do interchange well. They play balls off to each other, they're movement is very good and if you give them that time and space they will hurt you."

The Millers doubled their lead with 27 minutes and 39 seconds on the clock.

Tumkaya drilled a clearance up which was headed clear by Girt but his clearance failed to get distance and N'Guessan played the ball inside to Edgar. He drilled his low shot which should have been gathered by Lee-Wharton as he dropped but he allowed the ball to go through his legs and N'Guessan nipped in to poke the ball over the line from very close range.

Watson said: "You look at the goals we've scored, they've come from lots of different places. Danny Smith's got three goals, Anthony Edgar has got lots of goals, Joe N'Guessan's got lots of goals, Lisbie, Francis Babalola.

"What was important was Joe got higher up the pitch, that was important for us. They were both very frustrated in the first half, especially Joe N'Guessan and I spoke to him, I had a private conversation with him at half-time and I'm not saying that was the difference second half but with someone like Joe he's a flair player and it's not always going to go their way but he's scored two great goals and that was a good goal, good move."

Batten added: "I think the last (three) goals we're very disappointing but then again we were pushing hard, we were trying. We were a goal behind and you're going to start leaving gaps and they're going to exploit them and when it breaks down it's very difficult to get back in if you're chasing a two goal deficit."

Sheppey United will be kicking themselves when they missed a couple of chances following two Batten corners from the right.

Walker's punch didn't get enough distance on it and Botterill's looping header was tipped over by the 37-year-old.

Jono Richardson (who replaced Amoah at the interval) came up from the back and was destined to score with a far-post header but Bradshaw steered his header over the crossbar from on the goal-line, which was more like a goal-line clearance from a brave defender than a striker on 23 goals for the season.

"I've left Jono out for a couple of games because he hasn't been showing the form that he did last season but I'm hoping that he'll come back and be the same player," said Batten, who found the funny side of that glaring miss.

"Dan joined their defence for a few seconds didn't he and headed it over. I thought it was going in and you think at that moment when Dan did that, he's facing the play so he's not aware of where it's going but when you're looking straight on, I thought it was a goal and I thought at that point I thought that's it. That's our day today, we're heading the ball off the line for them!"

"They've got a really strong attack. It doesn't mean the lad (Bradshaw) hasn't had a good game," added Watson.

"Kevin Lisbie hasn't scored but he was absolutely outstanding today so it's nice in terms of those goalscoring chances and things like that. It doesn't always reflect on the contribution to the team."

Batten's seventh and last corner was met at the near post by Denness, but he dragged his shot across the face of goal and Walker easily gathered by the by-line.

Clinical Cray Valley notched their third goal with 38 minutes and 45 seconds on the clock.

Hickey played the ball into Edgar, who flicked his pass to release Lisbie down the left and his low cross was played into N'Guessan's feet and his right-footed shot trickled across the keeper to nestle inside the bottom far corner.

"Look, Lisbie's contribution to both goals was second to none really. Great weighted pass through to Joe, great composure from Joe, good finish," said Watson.

"I think at that point we're 3-0 down and we're a little deflated I felt," admitted Batten.

"When we're going forward, players were finding it hard to get back at that point. We gave them too much time and space!"

The Millers wrapped up the scoring by scoring their fourth with 42 minutes and 37 seconds on the clock.

Although 17-goal Lisbie didn't get on the scoresheet his link up play was outstanding.

He was released down the left channel and put the goal on a plate for Edgar, whose dink over Lee-Wharton and into the centre of the goal from 10-yards was outstanding.

"Look at the pace going down the left! He's been chased by Timmy Babbington who is quick and running with the ball and getting away from him and then just composure and the timing of the ball, it's as good as you see at any level. Great finish, great composure, that's come off confidence.

"We do score quite a lot of goals but we don't keep enough clean sheets so that's something that we need to work on.

"Ok those players have scored those goals but Ashley Sains at the back, the job he does; Cem Tumkaya, Liam Hickey, Andy Walker, Danny Smith, allows those (forward) players to do what they do. Josh James, Jack White in midfield, they allow those players to do it so we need to recognise that as well. It's not about the front part."

Batten added: "It's hard to criticise the lads, they've given everything on the day and we've come up a little bit short on today's performance."

Sheppey striker Bradshaw who is targeting 35 goals this season, had a couple of late chances after meeting a couple of excellent crosses out from the right from Timmy Babbington and then Edwards. His first attempt was headed straight at Walker, his second attempt, he slid past the far post.

"I think that was Dan's day today, he's just apologised to me in the changing room for missing a few. Strikers go like that. It would've been nice if a couple of them would've been finished off. I think it would've been an interesting game if we got a goal or two.

"Local businesses are sponsoring Dan and giving him so much towards charity if he can reach his target of 35 goals and I think he's well on course, baring injuries, he should make it."

Sheppey United travel to Homelands Stadium in Ashford to play First Division side Kennington in the Challenge Cup Second Round on Wednesday night, before hosting Corinthian here next Saturday, while Cray Valley welcome Deal Town to Middle Park Avenue for a league game in seven days time.

Cray Valley are joined by Bearsted and Canterbury City in the Last 32 of The Buildbase FA Vase (5-6 January).

Watson said: "It'll be interesting where I have to go around Christmas time to watch a game. Our game on Boxing Day has been postponed so I could, whether the wife will let me, travel up north somewhere. She might do if she's allowed to come with me and I'll bring the kids and it's a nice hotel. I may ask the club to reimburse that.

"It's nice to get through to this stage. Anything we get is a bonus. What it brings is a new experience and it will ask more questions of the team. That's what we need to keep going. Days like today are confirmation to me that we're good, I know we can be good but can we consistently be good?"

Batten revealed he is taking their trip to third-placed Kennington "very seriously" on Wednesday night but reflected on leading the club to their best ever run in The FA Vase.

"I've been told it's the furthest the club has ever been in the competition so we've got to be proud of that," said Batten.

"We've got everything to play for. We're handily placed in the league (seven points adrift of leaders Fisher), we're looking to improve. We have improved the squad. The club is self-sufficient in terms of everything we bring in covers everything and we're quite proud of that and it's a building block process and the club to build it to the heady heights to challenge to go up."

**Sheppey United: Aaron Lee-Wharton, Chris Edwards, Kwasi Amoah (Jono Richardson 46), Luke Girt, David Botterill, William Thomas, Sami Meziane (Timmy Babbington 59), Ian Batten, Dan Bradshaw, Rob Denness, Connor Westney (Hicham Akhazzan 76).**

**Subs: Kane Butler, Ollie Brown**

**Booked: David Botterill 46, Timmy Babbington 63**

**Cray Valley (Paper Mills): Andy Walker, Cem Tumkaya, Danny Smith, Josh James, Ashley Sains, Liam Hickey, Joe N'Guessan (Ryan Flack 87), Jack White, Kevin Lisbie (Calum Willock 90), Anthony Edgar (Nathan Palmer 90), Francis Babalola.**

**Subs: Denzel Gayle, Tommy Osborne**

**Goals: Francis Babalola 67, Joe N'Guessan 73, 86, Anthony Edgar 87**

**Attendance: 202**

**Referee: Mr Peter Cruise (Rochester)**

**Assistants: Mr Peter Newman (Leigh-on-Sea, Essex) & Mr Adam Miller (Southend-on-Sea, Essex)**