

Sutton Rangers 6 – 4 Comberton Crusaders

The first foggy, dull day of the season welcomed the teams to Sutton on Saturday where Comberton were hoping to break a poor run of form

In the early minutes of the game both teams looked up for the game and chances came at both ends but no-one could find the net. Sutton made the most of a rather spacious pitch, staying wide and keeping their shape. Comberton by contrast were struggling to cover the ground.

Seven minutes in and a Sutton defender instinctively clipped a big cross-field ball into acres of space to release the high speed left winger. He carried the ball to the edge of the box, took it past the last defender and shot neatly into the net to open the scoring.

Comberton looked shell shocked and their usual flowing football seemed to desert them. The Sutton keeper took a goal kick out wide into space, once again the swift winger ran on to it and found himself one on one with Ciaran in goal. He took the shot early and although Ciaran managed to get a hand to the ball but it ended up in the net to put Sutton 2-0 ahead.

Ciaran was back in action moments later saving a big shot a close range.

With fifteen minutes gone the ball was lobbed into the Comberton box and the bounce coupled with some poor marking left the centre forward an easy shot into the corner of the goal. At 3-0 down Comberton looked to be on the end of a hiding from a team specialising in counter attack. But Comberton are not the sort of team to give up and suddenly they began to wake up. Joe Cary and Harry Newman began to exert some control in midfield and ping the ball around. Sutton may have taken the foot of the gas a bit but Comberton seized on the opportunity. At the break the teams went in with Crusaders starting to show some signs of life.

At the break Coach Brendan McNally offered some intensive advice to the Comberton players and it seemed to work because they started the second half with a much greater energy and pressure. The passing and movement increased and the fluency returned. Suddenly Comberton were in the ascendancy and Josh Price had a shot from outside the box that deflected off a defender and into the net to pull the score back to 3-1. Moments later he was shooting again from distance but this time the keeper pulled off a fantastic save.

Tom Dawes then curved a corner into the box. Owen Coyle controlled it, swivelled and placed it low past the keeper to make it 3-2.

The comeback was on and Comberton pushed forward looking for the equaliser. With big gaps being left at the back, Sutton's mercurial left winger was in acres of space. When a move broke down on the edge of the box the ball was played long

and into his path. With the defence spread thin at the back Comberton could offer no resistance and the lead was extended back to 4-2.

Comberton were undeterred and when George Taylor won the ball on edge of box, he passed it through to Tom who immediately raced towards goal surrounded by defenders. As he reached the box he saw Josh Price alongside on the left and squared it beautifully for him to dispatch it into the net to take score back to 4-3. It was the best move of the match and probably the best goal Comberton have scored all season.

Sadly the hope didn't last as Sutton broke away once more down the left and scored easily to make it 5-3.

The supporters were enjoying the game as it resembled a close cup tie. Comberton were playing some wonderful attacking football and still they continued to surge forward. Josh received a throw-in on the left side and moved towards goal, despite a heavy challenge he got a shot away that beat the keeper at the near post and closed the gap to 5-4. A draw was a possibility but with defence a distant memory Sutton only needed to thump the ball into the vast space at the back and chase it down. In the event that's what happened and as Joe Cary came out of his goal to try to close down the oncoming forward Owen Coyle headed for the goal line and amazingly blocked the shot. It then rebounded back to the forward and he made no mistake second time to put the game beyond Comberton at 6-4.

This game was won and lost in the first 15 minutes. Sutton played with a shape that suited the large pitch both defensively and going forward. Comberton are not a defence minded team and when this combined with a lack of real shape at the back allowed Sutton to exploit gaps in the early part of the game. The cross-field switch pass was particularly effective and led to four of their goals. Once they woke up and in the second half, Comberton were able to play their usual pass and move carpet football. It was devastating at times but by leaving the back door open, they paid the price. Expect some formation and attitude changes for the rest of the season.

Player of the week: Josh Price