

Aveley are Ryman One North Champions



Sean Francis receives the cup from Nick Robinson.
By Neil Speight

East Thurrock United 2, Aveley 3

AVELEY lifted the Ryman One North title after one of the most astonishing finale's to a league championship.

In front of a season's best crowd of 845 a match that ebbed and flowed was decided in the final minute when defender Glen Golby, who had gone in goal after James Marrable was sent off for pulling down substitute Kurt Smith as he was about to score, produced a stunning save to keep out Max Cornhill's spot-kick.

It was the second time in the match East Thurrock had missed from the penalty spot. The first, when they had the chance to put the match out of reach came when Marrable saved from league top scorer Martin Touhy. He had netted more than 50 goals in all competitions before this match – but when it came down to the crucial moment, the golden boot was leaden.

Aveley had to win this game, the draw would have done for East Thurrock to take the crown and in a pulsating second half both sides found themselves with the scent of glory in their nostrils.

In the end the triumph was Aveley's after their 11th consecutive away win and now East Thurrock boss John Coventry has the task of lifting his team to face neighbours Concord Rangers in another derby at Rookery Hill on Tuesday.

Playing against the wind East Thurrock made the brighter start and in the first minute James Donovan headed wide.

However, it was clear both sides were nervous and all the players seemed keen to get rid of the ball which fizzed around like a hot potato.

The turning point of the first half came in the 22nd minute when there was a clash of heads between Kris Newby and Sean Francis as both challenged in the box and they both hit the deck. Francis recovered relatively quickly but Newby, who was unconscious for a short spell stayed down. The game was halted for eight minutes while he was stretchered off wearing a neck brace and taken to hospital.

The incident appeared to unnerve his team mates and five minutes later Elliott Gresham lost possession to Patriot Elbi who raced through and showed great composure to slot the ball into the net despite the efforts of keeper Richard Wray.

Aveley were clearly in the ascendancy at this point but failed to create a clear cut chance, though Eli did cut a ball back that ran across the face of goal waiting for a touch that never came.

Rocks rallied in the closing moments and the last real goalmouth action of the half saw Max Cornhill drag his shot wide of the post.

The first half wasn't really memorable, but the same couldn't be said of the second.

East Thurrock got back on level terms ten minutes after the restart when a flowing move saw Cornhill cut the ball into the path of Steve Harrison just inside the box and the veteran slid his angled shot into the back of the net.

It was advantage Thurrock and they looked likely champions on 63 minutes. Another good move ended with Ben Boyce producing a driven volley that produced a fine save from Marrable but when the ensuing corner came in Touhy was at the near post unmarked to score.

The game could have been all over with 16 minutes to go when sub Nicky Wettner tripped Boyce in the box. With regular penalty taker Newby in hospital, Touhy stepped up but his shot was comfortably saved by Marrable.

That turned the momentum Aveley's way and they got back on level terms on 77 minutes when Mitch Hahn swung in a corner and Richard Ketchell headed home. East Thurrock were still on top of the league at that moment but Ray Powell lost the plot and lashed out at Sean Thomas. The linesman spotted it and referee Tim Moffatt, just back from service in Afghanistan, backed up his assistant's call by sending Powell off.

There were few arguments and in a match of many important decisions it was another that the excellent referee and his team got right.

With East Thurrock on the back foot there were just five minutes remaining when the home side failed to clear their lines and Elbi squeezed the ball in from close range.

That sparked scenes of jubilation from the visitors and prompted Rocks to throw on subs Kurt Smith and Lee Williams and it looked a decisive move deep in added time when Smith chased down a long ball from Boyce. Marrable fumbled and the ball went over his head, leaving Smith the chance to score but the keeper hauled him down.

Marrable saw red and Golby went in between the posts.

Cornhill stepped up to take the kick and struck it well enough but Golby dived the right way and punched the ball away at full stretch to win the title for his team in the most unlikely of circumstances.

Captain Francis, who carried on after the clash of heads with his head bandaged, lifted the cup with blood, sweat and no doubt some tears to bring Aveley's season to a climax.

Aveley topped the league with 96 points, East Thurrock finishing with 95, surely one of the highest tallies for a side not to win automatic promotion.

Ryman One North: Final table

	P	W	D	L	F	A	+/-	Pts
1 Aveley	42	29	9	4	81	40	+41	96
2 East Thurrock United	42	30	5	7	112	50	+62	95
3 Brentwood Town	42	26	10	6	77	32	+45	88
4 Waltham Abbey	42	25	7	10	85	45	+40	82
5 Concord Rangers	42	23	10	9	83	34	+49	79
6 Northwood	42	22	12	8	65	39	+26	78
7 Wingate & Finchley	42	19	10	13	67	51	+16	67
8 Redbridge	42	18	10	14	61	50	+11	64
9 Ware	42	19	4	19	69	75	-6	61
10 Chatham Town	42	18	6	18	58	60	-2	60
11 Tilbury	42	16	10	16	62	53	+9	58
12 Enfield Town	42	17	7	18	71	68	+3	58
13 Great Wakering Rovers	42	16	10	16	56	62	-6	58
14 Cheshunt	42	17	5	20	60	71	-11	56
15 Leyton	42	12	15	15	63	56	+7	51
16 Maldon Town ⁽⁻³⁾	42	13	9	20	48	63	-15	45
17 Ilford	42	12	5	25	27	68	-41	41
18 Thamesmead Town	42	10	10	22	46	73	-27	40
19 Potters Bar Town ⁽⁻¹⁾	42	9	10	23	52	73	-21	36
20 Waltham Forest	42	9	7	26	39	81	-42	34
21 Witham Town	42	6	9	27	37	103	-66	27
22 Hillingdon Borough	42	4	4	34	35	107	-72	16

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