

# Fighting Esher can take pride despite going down

By Richard Spiller

Esher 19 Rams 33  
National League 1  
Saturday April 22

BATTLING bravely to the end, Esher's defeat despatched them from National League 1.

A season of struggle, having been promoted 12 months ago, started back in September when they were beaten 38-21 at Rams, the first of nine successive defeats.

Peter Winterbottom's side staged a spirited recovery but another poor run in the new year effectively condemned them to finish in the bottom three.

They started the day just outside the relegation zone but were aware Taunton would almost certainly beat Leeds – long condemned to the drop – which they did, 59-28.

And although Esher took a 19-5 lead in the first half, the hosts could not withstand a charge from Rams – knowing they must win to keep alive their title prospects – after the interval, lacking the firepower up front, as has so often been the case. A crowd of 1,170, boosted by a large contingent of Rams supporters, were entertained throughout.

Having started so poorly a week earlier in their defeat at Darlington, Es were bang on the button, a superb break through the centre from second row Adam Bullett sending through Pierre Thompson for the opening try after just two minutes, although the conversion was missed.

Scrum-half Thompson was at his opportunist best to conjure the second try, spotting a gap from the breakdown and nipping past the cover to speed over from around ten metres out on 19 minutes, this

time Morley hitting the target to make it 12-0.

The Berkshire struck back almost immediately, flanker James McRae fielding a kick just outside his 22 and breaking through the centre before finding Axel Kalling-Smith to burst down the right and cross over, the conversion going astray.

But Es were soon charging again, this time lock James Jordan peeling off the back of a maul to strike, Morley making it 19-5. It took the fly-half's points tally to 259 for the campaign, the best in the division.

Could Esher spring a surprise and save themselves?

Their habit of conceding just before half time resurfaced again, proving unable to prevent lock Connor Stapley from forcing his way through and Drew Humberstone added the extras to make the difference just seven points at the interval.

Thompson's day was to be spoilt by a yellow card for a deliberate knock-on, after 54 minutes as he intercepted full-back Henry Bird's break – although intent did not seem clear – and the visitors made the most of their numerical advantage in a flash. Having had one maul held up over the line, they struck when centre Humberstone barged over the line and converted to level the scores.

It was now becoming one-way traffic, Rams moving the ball about well to set up wing Zach Clow to score on the left after 64 as he bypassed two challenges, Humberstone squeezing over the conversion.

A delicately-judged chip from fly-half Rowan Grundy set up full-back Bird to charge through and send Ollie Moyné swan-diving in spectacular fashion over the line, Humberstone making it 33-19.

Es weren't giving it up, going close through a maul, but victory belonged to Rams, who must now wait to find out whether Cambridge can overtake them



Esher RFC in action against the Rams

on Saturday in their delayed final match and pinch both the title and promotion.

For Esher – barring the RFU having a change of heart about the number of clubs being relegated – there is the disappointment that they will start their cente-

nary season one step lower.

Yet they can take heart from their fight for survival and Division Two East will mean short trips to the likes of Barnes, Dorking, Worthing and Henley plus the opportunity to build back better.

## Milne hits his best in marathon

By GEORGE MALLETT



**HERCULES** Wimbledon Athletic Club turned out in force for the 2023 TCS London Marathon held on Sunday with a host of personal bests and an 18th place finish for Alex Milne in the elite race.

GB International ultra-marathon runner Milne, who represented the country at last year's European 50km championships, where he finished sixth, was only 27th at half-way, passing through in 1:07.50. He steadily picked off athletes, moving up to 23rd at 30km before gaining five more to finish in 2:16.30, a personal best by over a minute.

In the championship race, where athletes also compete for team medals in the British Team Marathon Champs, there were a number of impressive debuts from Hercules athletes.

Finishing in 2:25.53 and 46th in the championship race was cross-country captain Fred Slembeck, making his debut over the marathon distance. Slembeck passed through half-way in 1:11.47 and held firm over the second half. Slembeck will now return to babysitting duties of his newborn Kellia, born three weeks ago.

Claire Grima secured a fantastic 45th in the women's race, finishing the fourth best 45-49-year-old and in the process running 2:50.01.

Husband David made it a special day in the Grima household, as he improved his personal best to 2:38.46, coming home 517th.

Dom Kiralyfi was next third home for Hercules in 2:30.39 and 149th, a personal best by over three minutes and done running a significant negative split. Kiralyfi reached the halfway point in 1:15.50, running the next half a minute quicker in 1:14.49.

Another man making his debut was Finn Johnson, this marathon marking another high point in his return from a difficult injury in 2020. Johnson finished 248th in 2:33.59, pacing himself sensibly throughout. It will surely leave the Cambridge-born man hungry for more marathons in the future.

## Hurricanes storm to St George's Day Cup

THE St George's Day Cup brought an action-packed 15 consecutive reduced-timed games between all junior teams of Wallington League.

Each team faced each other in a league table format, with the winners crowned as St George's Day Cup champions.

The conditions were not great, a lot of rain fell, the pitch became sticky, but the players persisted.

The tournament initially started with very low-scoring, close games, with only two goals being scored in the first four matches, but as the day went

By PATRICK HUTCHISON

on the floodgates seemed to open.

Hackbridge Hurricanes notched a 3-0 victory against Beddington Cyclones and a 3-1 win against Wandie Thunder.

The defenses of Wallington Tornadoes and Beddington Park Blizzards stood strong, only conceding a single goal each in the entirety of the tournament. The goal against Wallington Tornadoes was a cracking effort by Jude Hibbert, on the volley from the edge of the box.

The penultimate match between Hackbridge Hurricanes and Wallington Tornadoes would prove to be the deciding factor.

Tornadoes took the lead but the never-say-never attitude of the Hurricanes saw them get back into the game with a goal by Henry Ruby. It looked as though it was heading for a draw, which would have meant a very nervy final match, but Jude Hibbert and Finn Wyner had other ideas. Scoring in quick succession, the match finished 3-1 and the Hurricanes were victorious and crowned champions of the St George's Day Cup.



The winners celebrate

## Mount to lead mass exodus?

By Tim Harrison

TO lose homegrown midfielder Mason Mount to a rival club might seem the height of madness when Chelsea's bloated squad has numerous others who are surplus to requirements, but both Arsenal and Liverpool are circling in pursuit of the 24-year-old.

The Blues' No19, a firm favourite with fans, is disenchanted with this season at the Bridge, and feels undervalued. His contract runs out next year, and he's not currently inclined to renegotiate.

But all that could still change at the end of May when a new manager is expected to be announced for Chelsea after Frank Lampard's disappointing stop-gap spell.

Root and branch surgery is needed, with as many as 11 players expected to be ushered out of the door in June, allowing a new gaffer scope to make some appointments of his own.

Others who may be wise to stock up on the club's grooming products and tracksuits while they can in the coming weeks include Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Hakim Ziyech, captain Cesar Azpilicueta and Kai Havertz. No effort will be made to bring on-loan striker Romelu Lukaku back from Inter Milan, while Callum Hudson-Odoi, who has been on loan at Bayer Leverkusen, is also expected to be sold.

All in all, the summer sale season will be hectic.

## Late heartbreak for Casuals on the final day



Corinthians players meet their fans

Picture: Stuart Tree

Corinthian-Casuals 1  
Billericay Town 2  
Saturday April, 22  
Isthmian Premier League

CORINTHIAN-CASUALS fell to defeat late on as they played host to Billericay Town in a game littered with chances for both sides.

There was little at stake for either team, with the home side already relegated and the visitors guaranteed a mid-table finish whatever the result, but that

By James Streatfield

didn't prevent a competitive game.

Casuals made the perfect start as Finlay Lovatt cashed in on a poor pass from Harry Seaden before playing a square ball to Mack Reilly, who tapped home from six yards.

Sahid Kamara was his usual energetic self, finding himself with a chance on the edge of the

box before firing a right-footed shot that smashed the crossbar.

Half time came and brought a change in momentum, with Billericay coming out of the traps and piling on the pressure.

Casuals' lead was wiped out soon after, with Kareem Isiaka firing high into the net after a remarkable effort to latch on to a hopeful ball over the top and find space.

At the other end, Kamara was involved once again as he struck

the woodwork for the second time, with Seaden rooted to the spot as his bouncing effort cannoned off the base of the post.

However, Billericay snatched a late victory when Alfie Cerulli's left-footed volley found the top-right corner in the dying seconds and Casuals were left feeling flat.

The result signs off a disappointing season for Casuals as they face up to relegation to Step 4 of the non-league system.