

SPITFIRES TAME LIONS IN DERBY



England expects!

ROMFORD'S Frankie Harvey, Billy Phillips and Joe Bliss flew out for England duty on Boxing Day.

Harvey and Phillips went with the under-15 squad to Sweden for a tournament — they return on January 5 — while Bliss and the under-14s crossed the Atlantic to play in a competition in Hamilton, Ontario.

Younger clubmates JJ Pitchley and Stevie Woodford are in the under-13 squad but have to wait a little longer before getting their chance on the big stage: they fly out to Quebec in February to play in the 48th World Pee-Wee Championships, following in the skate marks of several big-name NHL stars including 'The Great One', Wayne Gretzky.

Pictured (from left): Pitchley, Phillips, Bliss, Harvey, Woodford. There is no senior ice hockey action this weekend as both Romford teams enjoy a holiday rest.

Raiders, in fact, will have had a three-week break by the time they return to the ice with a trip to the Isle of Wight a week tomorrow (January 6).

Nothing less than victory over the bottom club will do as they try to shake off their recent poor form and relaunch their play-off bid.

With eight teams qualifying for the post-season, Raiders have slipped to ninth, a point behind Swindon — and they have played three more games. Swindon, though, have lost coach Ken Forshee, the Romford fans' favourite, and replaced him with Great Britain Under-20 coach Peter Russell, so they may take a while to adjust.

Points on the island are essential, for Raiders will struggle to get any reward from their next three games: they host joint leaders Sheffield on Sunday week and then face the other table-toppers, Guildford, twice the following weekend.

Romford Spitfires, having collected their long-awaited first win on Saturday, are also next in action on January 6, at home to Cardiff, and then cross London to meet Streatham the next day.

BIG Ben Osborne's hat-trick lifted Spitfires to the first victory of their debut season and provided plenty of Christmas cheer at Rom Valley Way on Saturday.

Their only previous 'win' was awarded to them after a 6-4 defeat by Haringey was awarded to them because of an ineligible player.

But they needed no help from officialdom this time as they skated deservedly to the points.

Osborne, a former Romford junior who has spent the past two seasons plying his trade for Slough and, ironically, Lee Valley before coming 'home' this year, snapped a tied game with just under eight minutes left and his third goal of the night gave the hosts some breathing space for the closing minutes.

There had been very little between the east London rivals for most of a hard-fought derby.

Rob Courtman had hit a post for the Lions as they dominated the opening session shot count to the tune of 19-6, while Ricky Mills pinged a shot off the top of the crossbar at the other end.

Mark Robinson's first-time shot clipped the foot of a post for Spitfires before Lions got their noses in front as the buzzer for the end of the period sounded.

Netminder Michael Gray smothered the puck with one second left on the clock but it was enough time for Andrzej Maslak to fire home direct from the resultant face-off.

Spitfires were actually on the powerplay at the time and made it count after the restart as Mills scrambled the puck home to level.

Osborne put the home side ahead a minute later but Perry Whitlock's trip on a Michael Ranby allowed Lee Valley to hit back on the powerplay as Maslak gained the zone and dropped a pass for Scott Beeson to fire inside the far post.

Beeson, another former Romford junior, was left to rue an ill-advised half-punch on Whitlock soon after which led to a ten-minute misconduct penalty.

And, after Stas Prokofiev was called for a hooking minor, Spitfires regained the lead on the powerplay. Jon Gray carried the puck up ice and laid it off to

English National League
ROMFORD 8 LEE VALLEY 5

LEE POWER at Rom Valley Way

Evander Grinnell at the left point, then drove to the net to deflect the youngster's subsequent slapshot past Stefan Nubert.

Romford were unable to make 1:02 of 5-on-3 count and had Michael Gray to thank for a fine pad save from James Scott-Joseph, only for a slashing minor against Matt France to give Lions the chance to equalise with the man advantage as an unmarked Romanas Fedotovas bided his time before backhanding the puck into the top corner.

The signs were not good when the tricky Fedotovas put the visitors ahead just 25 seconds into the final period with a wraparound effort.

But he quickly went from hero to villain by elbowing Osborne to hand Spitfires another powerplay, during which Sean Martin collected a cross-ice pass from Jon Gray and shot under Nubert.

France hit the post twice with long-range efforts over the course of the next eight minutes but it was third time lucky as he rifled another shot goalwards from the high slot and, although Nubert blocked with his pads, Osborne was right on the spot to convert the rebound for a 5-4 Spitfires lead.

Less than a minute later Nubert came out of his crease to play the puck but succeeded only in hitting it at Grinnell, who was delighted to see it bounce back into the net.

Lions hit back as Ben Williams pounced on a loose puck and found the top corner to make it a one-goal game again with just over five minutes left.

But any hopes of a comeback were quickly snuffed out as Darren Bonner forced a turnover in the Lee Valley end and Osborne backhanded the puck home.

Tom Looker got first use of the showers after knocking a loose Lee Valley stick away from its owner to collect his second ten-minute misconduct penalty, an automatic dismissal.

But Martin got the final touch to claim an eighth goal and there was no denying Spitfires their victory.