

**U18's (Central) Match Report – Sunday 3rd August – Pre-Season Friendly
Phoenix Sports 2 Dartford 2 Ground:- Bexley Business Academy, Erith
K/O:- 1:00pm Forecast: Wind and rain**

A friendly between Dartford and Phoenix has become a regular in pre-season. This year the venue was Bexley Business Academy, with Phoenix playing the hosts.

On arrival at the ground, the size between the two squads was significant with Phoenix having 25+ players compared to the 13 of Dartford. It was the first game of pre-season for several players, but another welcome opportunity to bed the new faces into the squad. With Danny Crouch, Brett Fairman & Lewis Sutherland tasting pre-season match action for the first time, it was always our intention to get as many players as many minutes as possible.

The hosts started brightly and within a minute had forced a corner. The ball was swung in, cleared from the danger area, only for it to pinball and end up at the feet of a home player at the edge of the box. Adam Molloy had no chance of getting to the ball through a crowded box and was fortunate to see it, let alone save it!!! It took a while for Dartford to settle and you always got the impression, that Dartford were going to step it up a gear. This they did after about 20 minutes when an inswinging corner was met with a deft, flick header at the near post by Callum Nye for his 2nd goal in 3 games. The Darts goal was never really threatened in the first 30 minutes, and Dartford created several chances, but the all important finishing was missing. As a friendly, the game was split into 3 lots of 30 minutes instead two halves of 45 and the first of these sections finished 1-1. The changes for Dartford were, Crouch and Sutherland off and Fairman and Jordan on. The instructions to the players centred around retaining shape in the middle and ensuring that the wide men were in the right areas to receive the ball. It wasn't the widest of pitches, and once the two Dartford wingers started to creep in, it really did narrow up the game. The 2nd third started with Jack Walter moving from right back to right midfield, Charlie Crudden dropping from left midfield to left back and Connor Heffernan switching from the right to the left wing. Dartford started well and looked to be grabbing the game by the scruff of the neck and continued to force some good saves from the Phoenix keeper. During one of the Phoenix attacks, a speculative shot from 20yards, took a wicked deflection that left the Darts keeper, Adam Molloy, stranded and all he could do was watch the ball dribble in the goal. Dartford continued to force the pace and carve out some decent openings, with Ola Ayoola looking dangerous, bringing the ball from centre back into centre midfield. Also having a good game were the centre midfield pairing of Sean Heather and Karl Dent. As with the the centre pack pairing of Ayoola and King, these partnerships hadn't played together before, yet they look as though they've been playing together for many a game. Darts couldn't find the net for the remainder of the 2nd period despite forcing further good saves from the Phoenix keeper. Score 2-1

The talk during the 2nd break was all about the team pulling together to stamp their authority on the game. Crouch came on for Nye. The moment they took to the pitch you could see the reaction from the players. The tackles started to fly in and despite protestations from the home bench, you could count the number of bad fouls on the thumb of one hand!!! However, my honest belief is that the worse tackle of the day was more down to the slippery surface more than intent by the Dartford player Brett Fairman. Brett slipped as he went in to challenge a Phoenix player, and it did cause a bit of heated debate but Brett held his hands up afterwards and did say he started to slide and couldn't stop himself. Tackles aside, Dartford continued to look for the equaliser and were now dominating. But with 10 minutes of the 3rd period gone, Ola Ayoola (centre back !!) picked the ball up in the centre of midfield and strode forward ominously. He unleashed a shot from 25 yards which beat the keeper low down to his right. This was no more than Dartford deserved for their reaction to the managers instructions.

Both sides had one last chance to win the game, firstly for the visitors when a fantastic counter attack ended in a brave save by the Phoenix keeper at the feet of Ola Ayoola (centre back !!!). The last chance for Phoenix came when what looked like a certain goal, was saved well by Adam Molloy when he also had to rush out bravely to the feet of the on rushing Phoenix attacker.

There was plenty of other attacking and defending points that deserve a mention, not least the goal line clearance by the impressive Rob King and the great turn, run and left footed shot that flew just over the bar by James Jordan. For the 3rd game for this group of players, the performance was full of encouragement and we can look forward to next weeks game against Thurrock, 2pm Community Pitch.

Well done to all the players, but the last word has to go to Ola Ayoola, who was tireless all game and despite playing with a slight injury, got up and down the pitch, to make his presence felt at both ends, well done Ola.

Squad:- Molloy, Walter, King, Ayoola, Crudden, Heather (C), Heffernan, Dent, Nye, Crouch, Sutherland, Fairman, Jordan

Goals:- Nye, Ayoola MOTM:- Ola Ayoola

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