

**Sunday 10th August – Pre-season friendly Dartford FC U18s 6 Thurrock FC U18s 0
Community Pitch – 2pm k/o Weather Forecast:- Very windy! Referee: Cengiz Ibrahim**

This weekend saw the annual pre-season friendly between Dartford and Thurrock under 18's. These are always good games with both teams playing a similar style of football. This years venue was the community pitch at Princes Park – a surface that suits both sides passing game.

The pre-match instructions to the Dartford side were all about working hard and striving to bring the elements of our training & coaching in to the pre-season games so that they become second nature in competitive games. The main points that the coaching staff were looking for were starting at a high tempo, involving the full-backs as much as possible and ensuring that the defensive part of our game didn't suffer as a result of pushing the full backs on.

The game had a good tempo to it from the 1st whistle and it was the visitors that had the first effort on goal when Adam Molloy dealt comfortably with a long-range effort. Dartford started to impose themselves on the game more and more and it was pleasing to see that the players had taken onboard the points expressed by the manager and coach. One of these points was to get the ball forward quickly when the chance presented itself. This opportunity came when a through ball from the centre of midfield found a fantastic in to out run by James Jordan. JJ collected the ball and calmly slotted it past the onrushing Thurrock keeper to make it one nil to the Darts.

The goal visibly lifted Dartford and they were soon looking to add to the score line. They didn't have to wait long! Five minutes after taking the lead, a great run in to the box by the centre midfield player, Karl Dent, was ended rather abruptly by a foul challenge. Danny Crouch put the resulting spot kick away to the keepers right for his first pre-season goal.

By this time the young Darts were controlling the game. The creative play was fast and flowing and it sometimes appeared that we had an extra man on the pitch! At one stage the opposing players were complaining that they were chasing shadows – one of his team mates then lightened the mood by saying that never mind chasing shadows, I cant even see shadows! To be fair, Dartford were playing very well and making full use of the surface and the large pitch. A third goal was added when Callum Nye collected a James Jordan flick. Callum took one touch and poked it past the exposed Thurrock keeper. With 15 minutes to go the two Dartford substitutes were brought on with Billy Eves replacing captain for the day, Ola Ayoola, and Frazer Thorne-Bent replaced James Jordan. Half time score Dartford 3 Thurrock 0.

The half-time chat was a rather dull affair this week! We spoke about doing the same things in the second half but with a plan B up our sleeves if our opponents succeeded in stifling our wide players. The second half started pretty much in the same way as the first had finished. Eight minutes in to the re-start, Callum Nye collected the ball 40 yards from goal. The Thurrock defenders tried to crowd the Dartford forward out but Nye was having none of it. Two of the defenders were shrugged aside and then the goalie thought he would join in to continue the 2 against 1 theme. Unfortunately the keeper had left it too late and he arrived just in time to see the ball go over and by him and in to the net for a second goal for Callum and a fourth for Dartford. This was a goal as much owed to strength as it was to skill but the finish was clinical and seemed to knock the stuffing out of the visitors.

Five minutes later Ola came back on for the impressive and calm Ashley Issuree and James returned to the game in place of Connor Heffernan. Connor had a particularly good game and linked the play up well between midfield and the forward line.

Dartford continued to push themselves but more importantly kept up the phenomenal work rate. Their efforts were rewarded further when a long run by Danny Crouch met up with the ball in the Thurrock penalty area. Crouchy beat the keeper to the ball and knocked it past him and with his next touch, put the ball in to the unguarded goal with the outside of his right foot to put the Darts five up.

Five minutes later the score became 6 – 0 when Crouch connected with a corner from the Dartford right. The ball cannoned in off of a defenders knee but this was Danny's first full game of pre-season and his work rate merited the 3 goals. The effort was on target and it would be churlish not to let Danny claim his hat-trick.

This report may make it sound like the opponents were poor. This wasn't the case. It was much more a case of Dartford's forwards taking their chances. Yes, the forwards played well and yes, the midfield played well but so too did the defenders and the keeper. The left back, Charlie Crudden, played as good a wing-back game as I have seen at this age group. The right back, Brett Fairman, matched him on the other side and it was these players making up an extra midfielder that allowed the left and right midfielders to push on and get crosses in from more dangerous angles.

We had 7 players missing for this game and this threw together some new combinations and forced my hand in to playing players out of position. The centre mid pairing of Karl Dent and Crouchy was well balanced, they communicated well and they defended well as a pair. With JoJo Baiden and Connor tucking in to deny our opponents space, we were able to win the ball back quickly.

Special mention has to go to Brett and Karl for their joint men-of-the-match performances. Two players that worked extremely hard and never stopped running.

This weekend we are playing Canterbury City away, 2pm k.o. at Canterbury Secondary School. Canterbury won the U16 South title last year and I am sure that they will provide a tough test for us – exactly what is needed at this time of year.

Squad:- Molloy, Fairman, Ayoola (C), Issuree, Crudden, Heffernan, Dent, Crouch, Baiden, Nye, Jordan Subs
all used:- Eves, Thorne-Bent

Goals:- Crouch (3), Nye (2), Jordan (1) **Joint MOTM:-** Karl Dent & Brett Fairman

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