

Today saw a trip to the cathedral city of Canterbury to play Canterbury City, winners of their respective league last season. It promised to be a tough game against a team that has won many honours for a club that is on the up.

This was only our second pre-season game on grass – the others being played on the 3G community pitch at PP. In the past we have always struggled with adapting to grass after having played on such a good surface as the 3G so I was apprehensive when I first saw the CC pitch for today's game. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't a bad pitch and it was certainly better than many of the grounds we had to play at last season! At this stage of the season, we are always grateful for games and a big thanks goes to Canterbury for playing the host.

This week I tried something different by playing a 4-3-3 formation, allowing the 3 natural centre midfield players in the squad to combine and see how they played together. This also allowed me to play 3 out and out strikers as wide attacking front, the idea being we have 3 targets for our tactic of getting the ball forward quickly and accurately and trying to keep the ball in our attacking third.

After beating our last opponents quite heavily last week, I was hoping that this week would prove a much sterner test – easy games do no one any favours at this time of year. I was particularly hoping for a more physical test and this was confirmed 30 seconds after kick off! Centre back Ola Ayoola was shepherding the ball out of play for a goal kick and was unceremoniously dumped on his backside by a Canterbury forward!

Dartford were kicking in to the wind in the first half and this encouraged the side to pass the ball about on the floor. After 10 minutes a great through ball found the run of Frazer Thorne-Bent. Frazer took the ball in to the area and chipped it over the advancing keeper to put the young Darts 1 up – this was his first goal for the 18's having played for the U16's last season. It was a well taken goal and no more than the side deserved following their high tempo start.

Dartford continued to play well, not only up front but also at the back as the home side had a great attacking threat in the shape of their physical and technically blessed number 15 – well played No15 – more of him later!!!! The most pleasing part of the first half was how the midfield 3 followed their instructions to the letter and played more from side to side. By doing this, the full backs were never left exposed and this gave them the confidence to push on and join in the attacks.

Both sides created numerous chances in the first half, the visitors nearly added to their score but it was the home side that came closest when a shot from 20 yards cannoned back off the bar. The game was disrupted when the inevitable changes were made.

H/T Score – Canterbury 0 Dartford 1

The second half saw Dartford kicking with the wind and down the slope. This completely threw our game and we struggled to get the ball under control and in to the feet of our front men. We were giving the ball away and the home side needed no invitation to turn this to their advantage.

Four minutes after the re-start a Canterbury attack down their left ended with a ball in to the box. This wasn't dealt with and Adam Molloy in the Dartford goal was left exposed and the forward smashed the ball home from close range. This lifted the home side and they began their best spell of the game. In the 55th minute an attack down the Canterbury right resulted in a speculative shot from about 25 yards by the Canterbury number 15. Adam Molloy had the shot covered but a wicked deflection sent the ball in the opposite direction to Adams' dive. This put the home side 2 – 1 up.

The second round of substitutions happened after 65 minutes. This gave Dartford some fresh impetus and we regained a foot-hold in the game. We persisted with the 4-3-3 formation and to be honest the goals conceded were in no way a reflection of the change of formation.

In the 80th minute Danny Crouch made a forward run and was found by a team mate just inside the area. His angled shot across the keeper found the inside of the side netting to make the score 2 - 2 and a draw looked to be on the cards – this was Dan's 4th goal in two games. However, James Jordan had other ideas. JJ had gone close on a number of occasions but he had been well shackled by the Canterbury centre backs. JJ collected the ball just inside the area and turned inside to unleash an early shot past the surprised keeper. This was no more than JJ had deserved for his performance and it was his second goal in two games.

Canterbury very nearly nicked a draw when Adam was called in to action in the dying minutes but his two handed save from a 20 yard shot pushed the ball out for a corner. This was the last action of a touch and physical but fair game. It was just what was needed in terms of a work-out. Good luck to Canterbury in the coming season and once again, thanks for the match today.

Next week sees the visit of Sheppey to Princes Park for a 10.30am k.o. on the community pitch. This will no doubt be another tough game and will provide another stern test for the young Darts. Following the Sheppey game we have one further friendly away to Brentwood before the league starts on September 7th with an away fixture at Thamesmead Town.

Well done to the players today. Some were returning from holiday while others played out of position for the good of the team. The squad is shaping up nicely and I am looking forward to getting the competitive games underway.

Squad:- Molloy, Walter, White, Eves, Ayoola, Heather (C), Dent, Crouch, Jordan, Nye, Thorne-Bent

Subs:- Fairman, Snye, Heffernan, Issuree (All used)

Goals:- Thorne-Bent, Crouch, Jordan

MOTM:- The midfield 3 of Sean Heather, Danny Crouch and Karl Dent plus left back Luke White.

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