

**Sunday 21st September – Kent Youth League Central Division
Tonbridge Angels 1 Dartford FC 4**

Everyone at the U18s were looking forward to their first competitive game of the season after two postponed games it was good to finally get our season under way. There were one or two late changes to the team and this led to changing the formation. For the first time in a competitive game the 3-5-2 formation was used. The 3 centre backs of Billy Eves, Ola Ayoola and Rob King are good enough players to play in the backline of any formation and these 3 were the foundation that gave me the confidence to play 3 at the back. The obvious advantage to 3 at the back is that it allowed me to play 3 central midfield players. The game was always going to hinge on who controlled the midfield and it was clear from the start that the Dartford midfield were looking to grab control of the game early on. The 3 central midfield players for Dartford, Heather, Crouch & Dent, are a formidable trio and with Heffernan on the left and Nash on the right working tirelessly, the formation looked quite impressive. Upfront for the Darts this week was the experienced Callum Nye and the every improving Frazer Bent.

Dartford were kicking up the slope in the first half and this allowed us to control the flow of our passing. Dartford soon got to grips with the formation and on 15 minutes the midfield possession was made to count when Crouchy raced on to a through ball and found himself with only the keeper to beat from the right hand side of the box. Crouchy's shot beat the goal keeper at his near post to give the Darts a deserved 1 nil lead. Dartford were now really getting on top of the game with Adam Molloy in the visitors goal only having to deal with back passes and long range efforts. In the 30th minute, the impressive right midfielder for Dartford, Danny Nash, forced his way into the box and between two defenders, only for one of the defenders to hang out a leg and send Nashy to the floor. The ref waved play on but I don't think we'll see a clearer shout for a penalty this season. A minute later Nashy put in an excellent cross from the right which caused mayhem for the home keeper and the defenders. After a scramble, the ball fell to Frazer who rifled his shot home from 10 yards to put the Darts in control. The hi-light of the first half was the wide play from Heffernan and Nash. Nashy for his crossing and Heffernan for his work rate up and down the left. ***Half time team talk was all about focusing on what we were doing well and reminding the players of what had got them their two goal lead. Half-time score 0-2.***

With the slope in their favour in the 2nd half, it would have been easy for Dartford to resort to a long ball game but with 3 good passers in the centre of midfield the intention was there to control the ball and control the game. Dartford went close to adding to their score a couple of times, most notably from Frazer, whose dinked finish went just wide of the post but it was the home side that opened the 2nd half scoring. A long punt up field saw Adam Molloy come and claim the ball on the edge of his area and get the ball fully under control in two hands but the Tonbridge forward clearly kicked the ball out of Adam's hands and put the ball into an empty net. This was naturally disappointing, especially after having been denied a certain penalty but we have to respect the refs decisions, get on with the game and try and take a positive approach when things go against us.

The Dartford players seemed determined to restore the 2 goal lead and this was shown by an increase in the work-rate all over the pitch. Some excellent closing down by Karl Dent, resulted in him robbing a home defender of the ball and he calmly steered the ball home from 18 yards with only the keeper to beat. With the game seemingly under control the three substitutions with Tom Evers, Ashley Issuree & James Jordan replacing Connor Heffernan, Callum Nye & Danny Crouch. This may have unsettled the side a little and it was maybe this that led to the home side's best spell of the game. During this time, Adam Molloy made some excellent saves, the best of which was a strong 1 handed block in a one on one situation with the Tonbridge forward. He also made a good tip over when it looked for all the world that the ball was going to end up in the net. With 10 minutes to go, the best goal of the game was scored. The game was becoming a little stretched and this played right into Dartford's hands. The Dartford midfielder Tom Evers, found himself 25 yards from goal with a bouncing ball at his feet. As quick as a flash, Tom had sized up the situation and he coolly lobbed the keeper for a superb, individual goal which gave the Darts a secure 3 goal cushion. Dartford managed to create further chances for Frazer, who saw his effort come back off the cross bar and for James Jordan who had his shot blocked at the near post by the brave Tonbridge keeper.

This was a very satisfying performance full of good goalkeeping, strong defending, some excellent passing but most pleasingly four league goals. This squad didn't score as many goals as it should have done last season but I think with the balance of the squad this year I can see many more goals being scored from more areas of the pitch. Defensively we looked good with the ability to clear our lines when necessary but also being able to pass our way out of trouble whenever we can.

Next match: Thursday 25th September – FA Youth Cup – Away to Maidstone 7:45pm k/o. Next League match: 5th October - Home to Chatham Town 11am k/o

Team:- Molloy, Eves, Bent, Ayoola, King, Heather ©, Nash, Dent, Nye (Evers 60), Crouch (Issuree 70), Heffernan (Jordan 60)

Subs not used: Fairman, Sutherland

Goals: Crouch, Bent, Dent, Evers

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