

Sunday 24th August – Dartford FC U18s 7 AFC Sheppey 0 – Pre-season Friendly Community Pitch

This week saw the opportunity for the U18s at Dartford to test themselves against a fellow Kent Youth League side. The decision was made to continue with the 4-3-3 system that served us so well against Canterbury City in last weeks 3-2 win. Due to holidays and injuries, the squad was low on numbers this week with players once again having to play out of position for the good of the team. However, such is the way that this squad has come together pre-season, I get the feeling that whatever team is put out and whatever position the players are put in, I can rely on the players to give 100% commitment and hard work, and such is the ability in the squad, they will give most teams a good game.

The U18 Darts were urged to get the ball down and played at a high tempo, and this they did from the first whistle. The centre midfield 3, marshalled well by captain Sean Heather, took an early hold of the game. Sheppey seemed to have difficulty in making their midfield numerical advantage count and had difficulty dealing with the passing and movement of the Dartford midfield. The two wide players for Dartford kept their positions well and this spread the Sheppey midfield out. This allowed the Darts midfield more time on the ball and Ashley Issuree took full advantage of this when he picked the ball up 25 yards from goal. His shot took a deflection and ended up in the goal but it was no more than the home side deserved. By now Sheppey were beginning to find their feet and started to compete a little more. However, the only action that Adam Molloy saw in the first half was a long range effort which he covered well.

With 20 minutes gone, Dartford forced a corner on the right. Connor Heffernan's deep kick found Ola Ayoola unmarked at the diagonally opposite corner of the box. Ola's first time lobbed effort cleared the keeper and found the top right hand corner of the goal. This put the Dartford side 2-0 up and it wasn't long before the third goal came! Connor Heffernan found himself 20 yards from goal with the ball at his feet. He picked his spot and coolly chipped the keeper.

Despite further chances no further goals were added and the half-time score was 3-0. My only concern and the focus of the half time talk was that we appeared to be getting a little bogged down and overplaying on the right hand side. The instruction was to move the ball more quickly from side to side and not to play in straight lines up and down the flanks.

The 2nd half started in much the same vein as the 1st had finished with Dartford instantly on the attack and looking to score further goals. The team didn't hang about and two quick goals by James Jordan showed just how dominant Dartford were. The goal of the game was scored by Jack Walter, who was playing in an unfamiliar central midfield role. He collected the ball just outside the centre circle and used his first touch to play the ball forward whilst gauging the goalkeepers position. Jack then hit a lofted shot over the keeper and into the far corner of the net from 40-45 yards. This was a great piece of individual play but just as pleasing as the finish was the running off the ball that allowed Jack the time to get his head up and pick his spot.

A further goal was added by James Jordan to complete a 7 nil win. The whole team did fantastic and in the face of many key players being missing, two or three players have given me a really nice headache to have as their performances have left me with little choice but to play as similar line up as possible in the next game. The goalkeeper and defence did well to keep a clean sheet and I think the 4-3-3 formation helped the defence as they have 3 covering players in front of them.

The final word on this game has to go to Ashley Issuree who had a fantastic game in the centre of midfield. He got the early goal and later on struck a post in an all action display. He looked calm on the ball and strong in the tackle and his passing kept the Sheppey defence under pressure all game – well done Ash ☺.

Next week sees the final pre-season game when we are away to Brentwood Town. Even at this early stage of the season, players are making it clear as to how much they want to play football and be at the club. And so far this has been a very pleasing pre-season and the players have worked extremely hard. Personally I can't wait for the competitive games to begin and I sense that the squad is looking forward to what should be a positive and entertaining season.

Team:- Molloy, Fairman, Ayoola, Eves, King, Heather ©, Walter, Issuree, Jordan, Thorne-Bent, Heffernan
GOALS:- Jordan (3), Walter, Heffernan, Ayoola, Issuree
MOTM:- Ashley Issuree

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