

Thursday 30th April Dartford 1 Ebbsfleet 1

This was one of those games that was never going to win either side of the title but a win for either team would make their run in slightly easier. We were weakened by injury and had to start with players carrying knocks. We had a real ding dong of a game at Ebbsfleet earlier in the season, where we ran out 2-1 winners. We were determined this time, not to fall for any fun and games and we had a real sense of purpose about our play, both when we had the ball and when we weren't in possession. The game was always going to have a hectic and I think that all players realised they weren't going to get much time on the ball. The game started at great pace and both teams created early chances but due to Dartford's greater share of possession, Ebbsfleet were counter attacking well. Midway through the first half, Dartford were awarded a free kick in the central area, about 20 yards out. Jake Burman stepped up and smashed the ball, only for the referee to rule the goal out due to an Ebbsfleet defender breaking from the wall. I can't agree with this as surely the best punishment for a defending team is to concede a goal. We had other chances in the first half as did Ebbsfleet, but good defending and goal keeping kept score at 0-0. *At half-time, we spoke about competing physically, doing what we do best and not giving anything away. We returned to the field with the intent to push our opponents as hard as possible by continuing to try and win the game.* Both sides continued to create chances and the tackles continued to fly in, but the nature and the spirit of the game remained good. With about 20 minutes to go, Billy Eves had to leave the pitch due to a thigh strain and was replaced by Joe Foster. This had to happen at a set-piece and unfortunately we dropped our guard for one second and an Ebbsfleet player was allowed to volley home at the near post. Rather than letting our heads drop, we used this setback as the platform for one final push. Marco Duarte replaced Danny Nash and a change of formation ensued with 4 forwards now on the pitch. This helped us gain the upper hand and it looked like the next goal was going to make or maintain one teams title challenge. Ebbsfleet didn't clear a long goal kick from Adam Molloy, and Marco Duarte did excellent to toe the ball past a defender and allow Dartford to drive into the Ebbsfleet penalty area. Marco then got involved in the box and was pushed from behind and the ref awarded the penalty. Danny Crouch stepped up and scored comfortably and from this moment on Dartford were really testing Ebbsfleet who were clinging on for dear life. Despite lots of pressure and persistently putting the ball into the Ebbsfleet box, we failed to get the winning goal and the game ended at 1 apiece. Although 1-1 was a fair result, the fact that Ebbsfleet were clinging on for 20 minutes, showed just how much we had them on the rack. For me, the overall positive from the game was the spirit that the match was played. It was tough, it was competitive, but it was fair from both sides. It was one of those games where everyone finished up smiling and leaving the pitch as friends. It was a joy to see at least 120 people turn up to witness a fantastic game of football. The point puts us 3 points behind Ebbsfleet as well as 17 goals behind on goal difference, with 4 games to play. We've now taken 4 points of our nearest title challengers and for it to potentially come down to goal difference, is testament to both sides quality. We pay a visit to Bearsted this weekend (3rd May), a team that we narrowly defeated 4-3 last month. We really have to go some to pull back the goal difference, but you can never say never, where football is involved. Difficult to choose a man of the match, when everyone has played such a big part. I think that perhaps man of the match has to go to Luke White for pinning back his dangerous, opposing player and also to the way, which he overcame his cup final disappointment only to go out and run his socks off for the good of the team.

Team:- Molloy, Walter, Sutherland, Issuree, Eves (Foster 65), Burman (Duarte 80), Nash (Bent 70), Crouch ©, Jordan, Nye, White

Subs:- Bent, Duarte, Foster

Goal:- Crouch

MOTM:- Luke White