

## Dartford Under 18 Catch-up From Andy

Due to work commitments it's been difficult to find the time to put the usual match reports together. However, things are a bit more settled now so normal service resumes! Rather than actual reports on a match by match basis, I thought I would let you know what's been happening with the under 18's and then go on to talk more about our upcoming KCFA Cup Final on April 26<sup>th</sup>.

Back in the middle of March we played Croydon in the quarter-final of the John Ullman Cup. We never really got going in the first half and we found ourselves 2-0 down at half-time, albeit to a very good side. Some changes were made at half-time and we soon got ourselves back in the game. Within 10 minutes of the re-start we were level at 2 – 2 with first Danny Crouch and then Luke White getting on the score sheet. We then received a harsh penalty awarded against us which was against the run of play. It was definitely a foul but even the Croydon striker couldn't believe that the ref had pointed to the spot as it was at least a yard outside of the box! 3 – 2 to the hosts but not for long. Luke White cut in along the line and fired past the keeper to put us level once more. We were well on top by now and pushing for the winner but we were caught on the break and Croydon snatched it 4 – 3.

This was a very entertaining game and the bright spot was undoubtedly the performance by MOTM Joe Foster. Joe had stepped up from the under 16's and played out of his skin.

The following weekend we returned to league action when Bearstead paid a visit to Princes Park. This too was an entertaining game, right from the very first whistle. With barely 5 minutes on the clock, Marco Duarte poked home from 10 yards to score his first goal for the club. Minutes later Danny Crouch doubled our lead. We then defended a corner very badly and allowed the visitors back in the game. 10 minutes later and another set piece caught us cold and the good start appeared to count for nothing. However, up popped Frazer Bent and we looked to be heading in to the break at 3 – 2 but Bearstead scored the goal of the game with a great lob and we went in even stevens at 3 apiece.

The second half was much more sedate but we should have wrapped the game up well before the visiting keeper gifted us a goal from a Danny Nash corner. I think that even given the nature of the winning goal, such has been our luck, or the lack of it!, in recent weeks that all donations are gratefully accepted! The introduction of Jake Burman to the squad was a welcome addition. He slotted in well to the side and he played as though he had been with us all season long.

I was hoping that the Bearstead win would give the players a bit of confidence, particularly given the start we had made. Due to the fact we didn't have a game on the 29<sup>th</sup> March, it would be a couple of weeks before we found out the answer to that one!

The next game was a home league game against VCD. We had had a fantastic game against VCD earlier in the season. On that occasion we ran out 5 – 3 winners but not before the hosts had threatened to turn over-turn a 5 – 1 half-time deficit!

I was looking forward to this game as it's a pleasure to play VCD as the coaches and players are great guys. We started the game with a few changes as we had quite a few players absent. We took the lead after about 20 minutes when Crouchy toed the ball home from a Jack Walter cross. We then doubled the lead when JJ lobbed the keeper following a great ball from Luke White. Luke had replaced left back Charlie Crudden who appeared to suffer a serious knee ligament injury when his knee buckled – good luck to the “ginger Ashley Cole” on his return to fitness!

H/T Score Dartford 2 – VCD 0. We were playing ok up to now but I felt that we weren't getting enough width in the attacking third. The players were sent out for the second half with instruction to keep the ball upfront and to bring the wide players in to the moves in our attacking areas.

Five minutes in to the second half and Callum Nye collected the ball in the inside left position. His run took him on to his favoured right foot and from his wide area in our attacking third he put over a fantastic cross which Frazer Bent confidently headed home. This was a great goal and showed the importance of stretching a back four.

We conceded a goal with about 20 minutes remaining but this was a good solo finish rather than an individual error. We forced some terrific saves from the visiting keeper but we couldn't find the net for any more goals and the final score was Dartford 3 – VCD 1.

This was a much more confident performance and this showed in how well the players played both individually and collectively. For the first time in quite a few games we passed the ball well and the goals were a good mix. Perhaps the Bearstead win, rather than the performance, had lifted us. I keep exclaiming to the players that they have a lot to learn but also that they have a long way to go in this game if they keep learning. They are now playing for their cup final places and perhaps this too spurred 1 or 2 of them on to put in a good shout for a place in that final team – long may that continue!

We are away to Maidstone on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup>, then away to Sevenoaks on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> and then we have the biggie, the Kent County Cup Final. I have been told by the club that we haven't won a final of this competition so it would be nice to make history that way but that will count for nothing if we don't put in a performance on the day. The club have kindly organised a coach for the final and if you would like to travel on the coach please contact Clare at [dfc.u18@ntlworld.com](mailto:dfc.u18@ntlworld.com).

All in all it's been a testing 4 or 5 weeks but we now appear to be back on track in the league. We are 4 points behind the leaders, Corinthian, but we have a couple of games in hand. There is a chasing pack so nothing is being taken for granted.

#### KENT YOUTH LEAGUE – CENTRAL DIVISION – up to 10<sup>th</sup> April

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	Pts
1	<b>Corinthian</b>	17	13	2	2	46	15	31	<b>41</b>
2	<b>Dartford</b>	15	12	1	2	47	20	27	<b>37</b>
3	<b>Chatham Town</b>	18	10	3	5	37	18	19	<b>33</b>
4	<b>Ebbsfleet</b>	12	10	0	2	39	14	25	<b>30</b>

#### Forthcoming fixtures (11am kick off unless stated otherwise):-

19/4 – Away to Sevenoaks

26/4 – KCFA Cup Final – Faversham Town FC – 10:30 am kick off

30/4 - Home to Ebbsfleet – 8pm kick off

3/5 - Away to Bearsted

7/5 - Home to Guru Nanak – 7:45pm kick off

10/5 - Sittingbourne vs Dartford

17/5 - Home to Maidstone (last game of the season)