

DARTFORD 5 SITTINGBOURNE 0

With original opponents Gillingham having to pull out of tonight's friendly fixture, up stepped Isthmian League South East Division side Sittingbourne FC to face the Darts on a beautiful evening at Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park in front of 427 supporters.

Manager Steve King continued the trend of naming two separate teams for each half during pre-season. And it was Ade Azeez who threatened to break through The Brickies' defence as early as the second minute, after he burst down the Dartford right flank, only to be brought down on the edge of Sittingbourne's box. Jack Jebb's free-kick was put behind for what would prove to be the first of several corners for the hosts throughout the match.

Captain Tom Bonner got on the end of the ball, but goalkeeper Magnus Lewis was able to gather it safely. Nine minutes later saw another Dartford break with Azeez exploiting the space offered on the right once again. He squared the ball towards the rushing-in Dan Roberts, but Jack Healey intercepted at the last second.

The hosts didn't have to wait too much longer for the breakthrough however, as a good forward move resulted in Azeez breaking through one-on-one with Lewis in the 14th minute. The striker slotted the ball confidently past the goalkeeper to open his pre-season account for his new club.

As the clock continued counting, the hosts got stronger, and they asserted their authority on the pitch while creating good opportunities. Kieran Murtagh and Jack Jebb combined well on the edge of the visitors' box, setting up the latter to fire just over Lewis' crossbar (19). Jebb was at it again soon after when he spotted Azeez in space. Unfortunately, his excellent pass was just out of reach of his rushing teammates (22).

Dan Roberts made an opportunity for himself in the 27th minute, but goalkeeper Lewis was able to thwart his attempt before Josh Hill reacted, only to see his strike deflected behind for a corner. Lewis was called into action again five minutes later, as he tipped an Azeez strike around his upright to keep his team somewhat in the game. The goalkeeper thwarted Azeez again in the 38th minute, after saving the Dartford striker's initial shot. However, he failed to make the ball safe and Azeez got a second bite, only to see a Sittingbourne defender clear the ball off the line!

With Steve King making ten changes at the break, the Darts got the second forty-five underway and had doubled their advantage with 47 minutes on the clock. The hosts advanced with pace and Luke Wanadio found Luke Allen with a brilliant delivery. The latter arrived to guide his header beyond Lewis before even breaking out into a sweat.

Four minutes later saw the goal scorer become provider, as he sent in a beautiful cross which Connor Essam got on the end of to send a firm header into the back of the net to make it 3-0.

Comfortably in charge, the Darts looked much sharper on the pitch, and continued to dominate proceedings as The Brickies began to look tired. Three goals became four in the 62nd minute, after Connor Essam got on the end of a Luke Wanadio corner to send his header beyond Lewis. The big

defender wasn't the only player to net twice this evening however, as Allen joined him four minutes later having struck a decent effort into the back of the net after receiving the ball on the edge of the Sittingbourne box.

The hosts calmed down now that they had a 5-0 lead, although that didn't stop one of the trialists from trying his luck after finding himself through on goal. He tried to send a curling effort into the top corner, but couldn't quite find the target on this occasion (71).

As for The Brickies? To be fair, they put in a determined effort, but on the rare occasion that they were able to be more adventurous in attacking areas, they came across a Dartford defence hellbent on not conceding a goal tonight. The visitors came closest in the final minute after being awarded their only corner of the evening. However, the threat was easily dealt with, and the defensive clearance proved to be the final move of the ninety minutes.

TEAMS:

DARTFORD

FIRST HALF: Craig King, Jordan Wynter, Bagasan Graham, Kieran Murtagh, Josh Hill, Tom Bonner ©, Noor Husin, Jack Jebb, George Porter, Ade Azeez, Dan Roberts.

SECOND HALF: Dan Colmer, Trialist #14, Connor Essam, Josh Hill, Jernade Meade, Samuel Odaudu, Luke Wanadio, Luke Allen, Tyrique Hyde, Trialist #22, Jake Robinson.

SITTINGBOURNE: Magnus Lewis, Freeman Rogers, Jack Healey, George Crimmer, Taylor Fisher, Wick Treadwell, George Monger, Tom Laynes, Harrison Pont, Jimmy Witt, Charlie Gill.

SUBSTITUTES: Johan Caney, Dominic Green, Ethan Stewart, Dylan Gilbert, Steve Mills, Reilly Connor.

By Chris Palmer