

## **FOLKESTONE INVICTA 2 DARTFORD 6**

Dartford retained the Kent Senior Cup, after coming from behind at the break to beat an extremely competitive Folkestone Invicta side at Chatham Town's Bauvill Stadium.

As the two sides prepared for the kick-off on a beautiful May evening in front of 496 supporters, it was a pleasure to see the return of Connor Essam. Having been sidelined due to an injury for some time, the defender took his place in the starting eleven alongside captain Tom Bonner. It was also pleasing to see the involvement of several Dartford Academy players in the Final, as Gabriel Duo, Jayden Boulton, and Ali Mansaray all started the game. Meanwhile, the substitute's bench consisted of a further five young talents.

A relatively quiet opening few minutes threatened to spark into life when Samir Carruthers released Ade Azeez with a delightful ball over-the-top in the fifth minute. The Dartford striker raced through one-on-one with Folkestone goalkeeper Connor Collins, who appeared to bring Azeez down. However, the referee Mr Harry Wager awarded Folkestone a goal-kick instead.

The goalkeeper was called into action once again in the ninth minute, when he made a good save to prevent a Danny Leonard strike from going in. And, Folkestone responded with their first opportunity seconds later when David Smith fired across the face of Reice Charles-Cook's goal (10).

Seven minutes later saw the Folkestone supporters thinking that their side had edged in front. After a series of quick-fire efforts inside a crowded Dartford box, Ade Yusuff smashed the ball home, only to see the goal chalked off for offside. That wouldn't be the last time that the lively Yusuff would cause problems for Steve King's side...

Folkestone were giving a good account of themselves during this difficult first forty-five, and began venturing forward with more confidence. A good run by Scott Heard went unrewarded when his powerful drive flew over the wrong side of Charles-Cook's crossbar after 22 minutes.

However, after a few half chances from both sides, Folkestone took the lead after 36 minutes. The attack came down the left-flank via Alfie Paxman, who then delivered the ball into the box whereby Yusuff was on hand to put it into the back of the net.

The second-half saw the Darts respond in a more positive attitude, as they set about creating more meaningful opportunities. Using their superior pace and the space afforded to Danny Leonard and Che Krabbendam on the wings, Dartford began pressing forwards and both Azeez and Leonard forced Collins into a couple of good saves early on.

And the pressure finally paid off when a Luke Allen header levelled the score in the 52nd minute. Folkestone responded as the game opened up, but Connor Essam made an excellent block to prevent them from re-taking the lead (55), before Charles-Cook made a good save from a Yusuff effort two minutes later.

After seventy minutes, a great attacking move from Dartford found Samir Carruthers on the edge of the Folkestone box. He pulled the trigger, forcing Collins into a fantastic save. The resulting corner was whipped towards the far post, headed back across the box, where it was met by a delightful Ali Mansaray header. Collins didn't stand a chance...2-1 to Dartford.

Once again, Folkestone responded though. First via Alfie Paxman, who's excellent run and subsequent cross couldn't be converted by David Smith (74), before the Darts failed to clear their lines and Smith took advantage to pull the score back to 2-2 (75).

From then on, three things happened. First, the Darts retook the lead via a Connor Essam effort which Collins couldn't reach in time (77); then Folkestone responded via Paxman on the left-flank once again whereby Kieran McCann had the ball in the back of the net, only for Mr Wager to rule it out for a highly questionable offside decision (79); finally, Dartford's superior fitness began to shine through.

Ade Azeez made it 4-2 after getting on the end of a terrific cross at the far post (82), before adding his second and Dartford's fifth soon afterwards when he took advantage of some sloppy Folkestone play in the midfield, raced towards goal with the ball and slotted it beyond the hapless Collins (85).

Danny Leonard then got in on the action to score a fine sixth goal for a now rampant Dartford (90), before leaving the pitch to be replaced by academy player Louis Atkins shortly afterwards. The only other change in personnel that manager Steve King made was in the 87th minute, when Harry Sargeant replaced Che Krabbendam.

The result ensured that the Kent Senior Cup returned to Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park, and Dartford finish the season in celebratory fashion.

## **TEAMS**

**FOLKESTONE INVICTA:** Connor Collins, Ian Draycott, Kieran McCann, Matt Nenman, Callum Davis ©, Ryan Johnson, Scott Heard, Ronnie Dolan, David Smith, Ade Yusuff, Alfie Paxman.

**SUBSTITUTES:** Michael Everitt, Lenny Atherton, Luca Borrello.

**DARTFORD:** Reice Charles-Cook, Gabriel Duo, Jayden Boulton, Ali Mansaray, Connor Essam, Tom Bonner ©, Danny Leonard, Samir Carruthers, Che Krabbendam, Luke Allen, Ade Azeez.

**SUBSTITUTES:** Tom Wray, Harry Sargeant, Dan Watson, Louis Atkins, Jimmy Shepherd.

**By Chris Palmer**