

Season's Review

Having successfully re-established a reserve team for 1995-96 in the South London Federation, the management felt that a higher standard of football was required if the experiment was to yield the desired results. Approaches were made to the South London Alliance and the FCN Kent County League but neither league was able to accommodate Dartford.

The directors then took the bull by the horns and entered a three year ground sharing agreement with Cray Wanderers Football Club and submitted an application for membership of the Winstonlead Kent League Division Two. at the League's AGM the application was passed but by the narrowest of margins. Still, it's always good to know who your friends are.

Manager Gary Julians started pre-season training with much the same squad as finished the previous season. He was hampered in his preparations as result of holiday commitments and was obliged to draw upon a number of youth team players. Three friendly matches were organised against local junior clubs Phoenix Sports, Crofton Albion and Larkfield all of which were won at a canter. The other games against Tonbridge AFC Reserves and Tilbury Reserves offered a better idea of what could be expected in the season ahead and resulted in defeats of 1-3 and 0-3 respectively.

August

The season began in earnest on 17th August at Beckenham Town in the scorching summer sun. The match ended in a 1-2 defeat with the first goal of the season being scored by Stuart Nicholson. The first home game was against neighbours Thamesmead Town. Dartford held the lead until six minutes from the end and had to settle for a draw. Dartford were well beaten by a strong Margate side and then turned victory into defeat at the hands of Furness. This result could definitely be put down to lack of experience at this higher level. The first win came on the last day of the month at Ramsgate in a game that saw Lee Jones returning to the fold

P. 5 W. 1 D. 1 L. 3 F. 8 A. 12 Pts. 4 Pos. 17th

September

The reserves' fortunes improved significantly during September with the four home games played resulting in four victories with only one goal conceded. A sign of things to come? Three consecutive clean sheets came against Faversham town, Folkestone Invicta and Corinthian whilst only Deal Town made any attempt to spoil the party. Folkestone turned up with only nine men and despite putting up a stout resistance, conceded five goals in the last thirty minutes to lose 7-0. During the month Richard King moved to Slade Green in search of first team football whilst Paul Dolan joined the club.

P. 9 W. 5 D. 1 L. 3 F. 19 A. 13 Pts. 16 Pos. 6th

October

Gary Julians had a fairly settled side during the course of October. His team lost 0-2 to Dover Athletic who were one place above them in the league, perhaps missing Darren Blackburn in the heart of defence. The Kent Intermediate Cup campaign started with a 4-2 extra time victory over Southern Amateur League West Wickham in the first round. The month finished with a Monday evening trip to Hastings Town in the most appalling conditions with winds of 70 m.p.h. and swirling rain. Having gone 0-2 down, Dartford scored twice in the last twenty minutes to claim a share of the points.

P.12 W. 6 D. 2 L. 4 F. 22 A. 17 Pts. 20 Pos. 8th

November

November threw up a couple of tough fixtures. The first was at home to Sittingbourne which resulted in a 1-1 draw, Daryl Apps scoring a fine goal to level after Dartford had gone behind early on. The other difficult match was away at Tonbridge AFC where Dartford led from the fifth minute before conceding two goals in the last fifteen minutes. Dartford were unceremoniously dumped out of the Kent League Division Two Cup at Ramsgate 1-3 despite taking the lead. During the month, the Warner brothers 'retired' whilst Alex Palmer made an unexpected return from college. Simon Hancock scored on his debut against Chatham Town.

P. 15 W. 7 D. 3 L. 5 F. 27 A. 20 Pts. 24 Pos. 9th

December

Tony Burman resigned as First Team manager and Gary Julians was named as his successor, taking over for the away game at St. Leonards Starmcroft. His last game in charge of the Reserves was the 5-0 thrashing of Whitstable Town. His replacement, at least on a temporary basis, was his assistant Mick Crawley who guided the team through December with a 100% record. Wins were gained over Corinthian in the second round of the Kent Intermediate Cup, and Dover Athletic and Beckenham Town reversing earlier defeats.

P. 18 W. 10 D. 3 L. 5 F. 40 A. 21 Pts. 33 Pos. 5th

January

The weather played havoc with the fixtures over the New Year period with four complete set of fixtures being postponed because of snow. Dartford's game at Faversham Town was abandoned at half time with the scores level. Goodness only knows why it was ever started. They returned from the enforced lay off greedy for victory and Whitstable Town were again on the receiving end, 6-1 this time. Mark Pool was on top form scoring some cracking goals in his hat-trick. The next week saw an exciting come-back from the dead at Fisher Athletic in the Kent Intermediate Cup third round. 0-1 down with fifteen minutes to go, a Kevin Spriggs penalty levelled the scores before Matt Smith popped up in the last minute to give Dartford an undeserved victory. There was more

of the same fighting spirit the following Tuesday at Thamesmead Town when Dhilan Vithane was the unlikely hero scoring the two goals that gave Dartford a life-line before Matthew Waters hit the fourth goal with just two minutes remaining (4-3). This was Dartford's seventh consecutive victory.

P. 21 W. 13 D. 3 L. 5 F. 52 A. 25 Pts. 42 Pos. 2nd

February

Gary Julians had been operating a policy of giving some of the younger players a chance in the Southern League and at various times Jones, Proberts, Abbott, Crawley, Spriggs and Pool were unavailable. During February the luck ran out for a while and having thrown away a 3-1 half time lead at league leaders Sittingbourne to draw 3-3, a further draw against Herne Bay was the last match in an unbeaten run stretching back to November. It was also the last match under Mick Crawley who, unable to commit himself fully because of work, handed over the reins to Terry Miller who joined from Thamesmead Town. A Kent Intermediate Cup tie away at Tonbridge was hardly the best place to start and a poor performance saw Dartford come away defeated 1-4 by the eventual winners of the competition. Stuart Abbott arrived from Sittingbourne but due to an administrative mix-up, his registration form was not lodged with the Registration Secretary in time and the points gained against lowly Faversham were lost.

P. 24 W. 13 D. 5 L. 5 F. 58 A. 32 Pts. 41 Pos. 6th

March

Seven matches were played in March. The first, at home to Tonbridge, was lost 2-3 although the team put up a much better performance than they had the previous week building up a 2-0 lead before eventually losing to a last minute goal from Alex Moore. Lee Miller joined from Thamesmead conveniently filling the vacancy left by Darren Blackburn's suspension and forming a watertight defensive unit in partnership with Stuart Nicholson and Jason Martin. Dartford never looked in any trouble during this period although perhaps needed to get that first goal under their belts before settling properly. Matthew Quinlan returned from who-knows-where to provide more options up front. Paul Dolan made a welcome return from long term injury and looked like he had never been away.

P. 30 W. 19 D. 5 L. 6 F. 73 A. 36 Pts. 59 Pos. 3rd

April

The run of success continued throughout April with goals galore being scored. The first match at potential title contenders Furness resulted in a 3-0 victory although it took a while to break the deadlock. Hythe United scored first but were unable to contain Dartford and succumbed 1-5 with three of the goals coming from Matthew Waters. A disappointing game against Crockenhill still produced a 3-0 win, whilst the best was left for the visit of Ramsgate. Dartford ran them ragged running out 7-3 winners. Several other-reasonable chances were missed and if the forwards had not been caught offside so often, double figures would have been a distinct possibility.

P. 35 W. 24 D. 5 L. 6 F. 95 A. 43 Pts. 73 Pos. 2nd

May

With only three games remaining (These notes being written before Saturday's game with Margate), the Reserves stand a good chance of finishing second in the Kent League Division Two and perhaps scoring 100 goals in the process. Add to this a semi-final place in the Kent Intermediate Cup and the number of players being given a chance in the First team, the season can only be looked upon as a success.

Attendances for the Reserves home games have been disappointing but they have in fact varied widely depending on whether or not the First team were at home. The best recorded so far has been the 73 against Furness and the worst 11 for the visit of Whitstable Town. Programme sales have generally been good and have served to raise some cash for the club

Appearances (to 29th April 1997)

VOWLES Simon	39	-	VITHANE Dhilan	5	(20)
MARTIN Jason	35	(2)	ABBOTT Stuart	5	(-)
SPRIGGS Kevin	36	-	QUINLAN Matthew	3	(11)
SMITH Jimmy	35	(3)	GREEN Danny	3	(7)
NICHOLSON Stuart	34	(3)	ALEXANDER Kevin	3	(1)
WATERS Matthew	34	(1)	WARNER Robert	2	(5)
BLACKBURN Darren	33	(1)	DORNEY Paul	2	(2)
APPS Daryl	29	(2)	SMITH Matt	1	(7)
POOL Mark	23	(5)	COLLINS Dave	1	(1)
CRAWLEY Mitchell	23	(3)	SMITH Marc	1	(-)
PROBETS Clayton	15	(1)	WHITE Stuart	1	(-)
DOLAN Paul	14	(1)	HODSON Greg	-	(9)
HANCOCK Simon	12	(6)	GOODWIN Jason	-	(3)
MILLER Lee	10	(1)	de JESUS Elder	-	(2)
PALMER Alex	8	(7)	JULIANS Gary	-	(2)
JONES Lee	9	(2)	BUNCE Lee	-	(1)
WARNER Dean	7	(15)	HOPKINS Ross	-	(1)
KING Richard	6	(-)			