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Saturday 18 th January

*The Maurice Rebak Stadium,
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VS



WINGGATE & FINCHLEY



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ISTHMIAN
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WINGATE & FINCHLEY FC

Hello and welcome to the Maurice Rebak Stadium! We hope that all associated with the club, the match officials and the staff, players and officials of Dartford enjoy their stay in N12 this afternoon!

Our fixtures against today's opponents are few and far between, with the only four fixtures between our two sides coming in the 2004/05 and 2005/06 season when both sides were in the Southern League Division 1 East, for the two campaigns we were transferred from the Isthmian League.

Dartford joined the Southern League in the 1926/27 season and have spent most of their history since in various divisions of that league. After a couple of short spells in the Alliance Premier then the Kent League, a couple of years were spent in the Isthmian League.

A promotion saw a few years in the Conference South, then to the Premier then back to the South, finding themselves back at step 7.

Company Name and Number:

Wingate and Finchley Development Ltd, 6014465

Ground: The Maurice Rebak Stadium, Summers Lane, Finchley, London N12 0PD. Tel: 020 8446 2217

Company Number: 6014465

Training Ground: Barnet Lane, Barnet, EN5 2DN

League Match Ticket Prices:

£12 adults, £8 concession, £5 for ages 11-18, under 11 free

Chairman: Aron Sharpe

Vice Chairman: Nicky Rifat, Joe Sharpe

President: Harvey Ackerman

Life Vice President: David Ackerman

Life Vice President: David Wolff

Life Vice President: Peter Rebak

Life Vice President: Steven Astaire

Director: Paul Lerman

Secretary: Andrew Kouroushi

Finance: Liam Blaney

First Team Manager: Ahmet Rifat

First Team Coaches: Ruben Gaspar, Jonny Georgiou, Ricky Machel

First Team Goalkeeping Coach:

Gavin King

First Team Analyst: Michael Smith

Kit Manager: Peter Barker

Head Groundsman: Andy Ward

Welfare Officer: Jonny Georgiou

Bar Manager: Lorraine Coleman

Matchday Hospitality: Tony Ward

Programme Editor: Joshua Palmer

CLUB NOTES

Congratulations David Wolff!

Our life vice-president David Wolff has recently received the London FA's Bobby Moore Award for 2024 Grassroots Heroes Award (sponsored by Panini!)

Congratulations David!

Mr Wolff is also chairman of the Maccabi (Southern) GB Football League (since 1970!), overseeing the organisation of the league.

His footballing career began back in the 1950s as a member of the Ivri Maccabi Youth League and is a supporter of West Ham United – once being asked to manage their under 16s team. He joined the MSFL Management Committee in December 1963 as assistant secretary, before rising to vice chairman in 1965 then chairman in 1970. During his directorship, the league has risen from 12 clubs to 66.

David has also chaired the London FA since 2022.

From all at the club, congratulations on your award David!

Cray Wanderers (H)

Our last home match, due to be vs Cray Wanderers on Saturday 4th January was called off due to bad cold weather in the days leading up to the game. This game will now take place on Tuesday 28th January, 7.45pm kick off.

New festive hot dogs!

Visit the tea hut under the main stand this afternoon to try our new festive hot dogs!

The Bird & Berry!
Turkey & studding with a touch of cranberry!

Christmas special
£7.50

New signing!

Please welcome our latest signing Benjamin Watt to the club!

Benjamin was previously in the Norwich City academy and spent last season at Braintree Town.

He can play as either a right back or in a midfield position!

Welcome Benjamin!

Top scorers 2024/25

Competitive first team games only.
Total games: 24 league, 7 cup:

	Lge	Cup	Tot.
Obi	19	3	22
Lowe	5	1	6
Drakes-Thomas	2	3	5
Frempah	4	0	4
Georgiou	3	1	4
Oladipo	3	0	3
Tanimowo	3	0	3
Deslandes	2	0	2
Newton	2	0	2
Briscoe	1	0	1
Iontton	1	0	1
Restrepo	1	0	1
Ward-Cochrane	1	0	1

LEAGUE RESPECT STATEMENT



“The Isthmian Football League strongly supports the Football Association’s statement that there should be a zero-tolerance approach against all forms of discrimination. Any inappropriate conduct toward others, including but not limited to that based on an individual’s sex, race, colour, weight, size, religion and belief, national origin, age, marital or domestic-partnership status, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression, will not be tolerated and will be reported to the relevant authorities. The Isthmian League and our Member Clubs are committed to promoting equity and equality by treating all people fairly and with respect, by recognising that inequalities may exist, by taking steps to address them and providing access and opportunities for all members of our communities.”



Respect

A VIEW FROM AFAR

As Dartford are our visitors today, three facts related to the Dartford Crossing, only one of which is true; but which one? Answer at the end of the column.

- *When the Dartford Tunnel (as it then was) first opened, there was no fee to use it*
- *The first work on the tunnel took place in 1936*
- *The QE II bridge, which began operating in 1991, was officially opened by Secretary of State for Transport, Malcolm Rifkind*

This is the first time I have had the pleasure of welcoming Dartford to one of my little articles, so if any one of their supporters accidentally stumbles across it, welcome to you. The Lady Wife and I did visit the Dartford ground earlier this season, when she took a photograph of our third goal, which would have thrilled one of those old cameramen – and they were always men – who would sit in little clumps to either side of the goal. A collection of them can be seen here, catching an image of the famous Gordon Banks save against Brazil in the 1970 World Cup in Mexico. If you are aged under 70, you may struggle to recall the moment, but Pele never did.



One of the thrills when watching in those days was when the roll of film was full and messengers would have to run from the photographer beside the pitch, to the local branch of Boots to have them developed – at least, that was my assumption of what was happening. A selection of pictures might then appear in the newspaper the following day.

It is possible that I might have lost the Dartford supporter's attention by now, as mentions of such antiquarian things as newspapers, rolls of film and even Pele, might have them confused. Nonetheless, I shall continue; for a time, I spent quite a bit of time in Dartford. I used to stay in what was then a Hilton Hotel, just to the south of the QE II bridge, while doing some consultancy work for a construction company close by. My wife is still

A VIEW FROM AFAR

excited by me pointing out the lights of the company's headquarters, whenever we head south from a match at the Maurice Rebak, on those occasions when the trains are being uncooperative; in other words, on every second visit.

It was in the bar of that hotel one evening in 2008, that the big screen tv was showing the second leg of the League Cup semi-final between Spurs and Arsenal. I settled in a seat, surrounded by strangers and after 3 minutes Jermaine Jenas put Spurs ahead; obviously, containing myself vocally was just possible but as so often, non-verbal communication was harder to conceal. I was very discreet, but somehow, slapping my hand on the table and leaping to my feet, thus spilling my beer, was somehow spotted by those of my fellow viewers more highly trained in observation skills, not to mention those people who were having a quiet chat or had opted for the scampi and chips bar snack that evening. I found all eyes turning to me and my attempts to pretend that a fly had somehow frightened me by landing on the table fooled nobody.

I therefore determined to play the role of a disinterested lonely bloke, passing a solitary evening in a hotel bar, glancing idly at the screen from time to time. Luckily, Spurs only scored on four more occasions that evening, so my role playing was not extended too much; or was that a suspicious glance in my direction from the chap on the far side, who happened to be wearing a replica Arsenal shirt?

Which fact is correct?

Amazingly, the first construction work was in 1936, although after long delays due to WWII, it didn't open until 1963. There has always been a toll charge, initially 2/6d (12½p) and not surprisingly the bridge was opened by the Queen.

By Peter Brown

WINGATE & FINCHLEY CLUB HISTORY

Wingate and Finchley Football club can trace its roots back to the formation of Finchley Football Club in 1874 making it one of the oldest clubs in the country. Founded by Pa Jackson, who also was instrumental in the creation of the Corinthians, The London Football Association as well as later serving as secretary of the FA, Finchley became founder members of the Athenian League in 1912 after spells in the London League and North London League. They finished fourth in the maiden season, higher than such luminaries as Grays Athletic, Chelmsford City and Enfield.

However their stay was cut short due to the onset of World War One and they would only return for a lone season in 1929 before returning to the London League and forging success. The club's first piece of silverware was won during the 1934-1935 season when the League Cup was captured, with the taste of achievement forming Finchley went on to win the London League in 1936-1937 before World War Two scuppered their winning streak.

It was immediately after the conflict that saw Major Harry Sadow, Frank Davis, George Hyams and Asher Rebak form a Jewish Football Club believing the field of play was a ground of battling the ignorance of anti-Semitism. So in 1946 Wingate Football Club began life in the Middlesex Senior League. The club was named after General Orde C. Wingate who despite not being Jewish himself oversaw the creation of the Israeli Army during the Second World War. The club enjoyed early success and by 1952 they were promoted to the London League.

Meanwhile Finchley, back in the Athenian League, were in the middle of their glory years with the 1952-1953 season proving to be the pinnacle. That year saw their progression to the Third Round Proper of the FA Cup. Defeated along the way were Chelmsford City, Kidderminster Harriers (1-0 at Aggborough) and Crystal Palace (3-1 at Summers Lane) before the Finches were finally beaten 2-0 at Gay Meadow against Shrewsbury Town.

Despite an Amateur Cup semi-final appearance, losing to bitter local rivals Hendon at Highbury in 1965, a sense of decline was starting to emerge. A switch to the Isthmian Premier League failed to stop the halt, and in 1980-81 Finchley were relegated to the second division.

Wingate by now had become a senior club and were competing in the Athenian League. Many players had become members of the Middlesex FA representative side and also partook on behalf of Great Britain in the Maccabiah Games. Disaster struck though in 1972 when their Hall Lane ground in Hendon was lost to the M1 extension and despite a short ground share with Finchley FC the club reverted to junior football.

Wingate finally returned to the senior game with a brief merger with Leyton FC. This partnership proved to be unsuccessful and despite a 1984-1985 League Cup victory, ironically defeating Finchley in the final, both clubs went their separate ways.

In 1991 with Finchley struggling in the Isthmian League Second Division and with mounting debts it was announced that a merger with Wingate would take place in the

WINGATE & FINCHLEY CLUB HISTORY

summer. After extensive refurbishment and a name change of the Summers Lane ground in honour of long time Wingate supporter Harry Abrahams, Wingate and Finchley took to the field for the start of the 1991-1992 season.

Success was immediate and despite starting life in the South Midlands League the club were quickly competing in the Isthmian League and by season 2003-2004 were members of the newly formed Division One North.

In recent seasons the club has continued its growth. A brief flirtation with the Southern League was shortly followed by the arrivals of Manager Michael Stone and Chairman Aron Sharpe. Now back in the Isthmian League a youthful squad achieved seventh position in the First Division North in the 2008-2009.

Stone sadly left the club in 2009 after being offered the post of Assistant Manager at Conference giants Rushden and Diamonds. The club's first team manager in time for the start of the 2009/10 season was former Oswestry Town manager and Total Network Solutions Llansantffraid midfielder David Norman. At the end this season the Club finished in a record high position of 3rd in the Ryman Division One North, mainly thanks to a record run of 17 matches without defeat from the turn of the year, a run which included 13 wins. The Club reached the playoffs but lost out to Enfield Town in the semi-final 3-2 in an incredible match. This paved the way for what was to be a monumental and unforgettable 2010/11 season.

The Club was quickly becoming the most progressive non-league club in the area, thanks to Sharpe's focus on youth development. Bobby Aisien and Medi Alabimba had progressed from Hadley Wood and Wingate to earn professional contracts, and in 2011 over 20 of the U16-18 age group represented their County. Six boys at U16's were given scholarships with pro sides and the club developed into a community club with a Mencap disability initiative, work with schools, and it entered its fourth year of the Flex educational scheme.

A consistent league season for the First Team saw the side match their previous 3rd place league finish and earn a second crack at the playoffs. In the semi-final Harlow Town were beaten 4-2 after extra time, and promotion to the Ryman premier Division was won with a 118th minute winner over Brentwood Town in extra time of the final - The Blues winning 3-2 on their home turf.

This victory was the middle leg of a remarkable and unique Treble. Earlier that season the club had lifted the Ryman League Cup having beaten Dulwich Hamlet 2-0 at Imber Court, and London Senior Cup success was to follow shortly afterwards when Hendon were convincingly beaten 3-1 in the final.

Success flowed throughout the Club this year, with the youth teams also building on their previous season's work as they progressed superbly. The U18's won the Middlesex County Cup, and at U15 level the League Title and three Cup trophies followed (two County cups and the League cup). Even the Under 10's were getting in on the action as they lifted the Spring Cup!

WINGATE & FINCHLEY CLUB HISTORY

The first season in the Ryman Premier Division in 2011/12 saw the side secure safety in this new level with a comfortable mid-table finish, ending up closer to the playoffs than from relegation. The final third of the season saw breakthroughs for youth players Liron Mannie and David Smouha who both played big roles in the first team squad. Meanwhile there was huge cup success at youth level yet again; The Under 18's won the AFA Cup, beating Valley Park after extra time, as well as the London County Cup. The Under 17's won a double as they beat Thurrock in the EJA League Cup final to add to their earlier AFA Cup success having beaten Bethwin 8-1! The Under 16's also got in on the action securing their AFA Cup title beating Woodford FC, which they added later on securing their EJA (Herts) League title.

Success of the youth sides prompted three players - Ross Weinreb, Nathan Sollosi and Joe Sharpe - to earn selection to the Great Britain Maccabi Team for the world games in Israel during July 2013. Meanwhile the Barnet Mencap disability sides grew in strength as they entered the fourth season with the club, with three sides now competing in the Camden Step Leagues. The year ended on a high as McDonalds joined in lucrative sponsorship deal.

The following season, 2012-13, was a difficult one for the first team. Early season poor form led to the departure of Norman in November as ex-Northwood boss Gary Meakin came in. The Club flirted with relegation all season until a momentous 3-2 victory over Lowestoft two days before the final day secured survival. However Norman rejoined the Club in the summer as Director of Football, as veteran defender Daniel Nielsen was put in place as Head Coach. Meanwhile a new Under 21 Development squad was set up to compete in the inaugural Ryman U21 League.

There was continual success for the youth sides. The U17's added the London County Cup to an earlier EJA league title, the EJA cup and the AFA cup. These were also followed up with the League Regional Playoff title. The U16's won two cups in this season, the EJA and AFA trophies.

In 2014 the side faced another relegation fight in the league, which was lost on goal difference on the final day of the season despite a 5-0 victory over Billericay Town. However, when Worksop Town pulled out of the Southern League due to financial problems, Wingate & Finchley were the first in line to earn the reprieve back to the Ryman Premier Division.

The 2014-15 season resulted in a record finish of 12th place in the Ryman Premier League, and at the end of the season Norman departed, to be replaced by Simon Lane as Director of Football. However for the start of 2016 he was replaced by former Northern Ireland International Keith Rowland and the side finished in a stable 13th position. In August 2016 the stadium at Summers Lane was re-named after Wingate FC co-founder Maurice Rebak who had passed away in February of that year aged 95.

WINGATE & FINCHLEY CLUB HISTORY

The 2016-17 season saw the club set a new record, finishing in 5th place in the Ryman Premier League and qualifying for the end of season playoffs. A last-minute defeat at Bognor Regis Town in the semi-final ended the season, but this was a magnificent achievement and saw the Blues win the League's Team Performance of the Year Award.

A ninth-place finish followed in 2017-18 as the Blues narrowly missed out on a second successive play-off berth. There was success for the Under 23 side who won the Isthmian Development League North Division at a canter. Over the summer the Club embarked on an extensive state-of-the-art refurbishment of the stadium, for the first time since 1991's merger, giving the clubhouse a much-welcomed overhaul and making the stadium one of the most impressive in non-league football.

The subsequent three seasons saw a period of uncertainty both on and off the pitch, with short management stints for ex England International Nicky Shorey, ex Premier League stalwart Glen Little and ex West Ham Academy and Wingate & Finchley favourite Steve Clarke, followed by two null and void seasons under the stewardship of Spencer Knight due to the COVID pandemic. However, during this period there were still many successes, including U18s winning County Cup in consecutive seasons and the London Champion of Champions trophy, U23 Development Squad being victorious in Herts League Cup fielding a squad largely made up of Under 18s, while both U13s and U12s secured League Titles.

In the summer of 2021, Club legends Ahmet Rifat (Director of Football) and Marc Weatherstone (Manager) were appointed as a new Management Team after nearly 1000 first team appearances between them. Later in the 2022/23 season Ahmet Rifat was to take sole charge.

Season 2024/24 will go down on record as one of our finest if not the finest. Finishing in 4th position with a record haul of 76 points and scoring 78 goals. Ahmet Rifat's charges made it to the play offs on the last day of the season with a 3-0 win over Carshalton.

We faced local rivals Enfield Town in the play off Semi finals at the QE II Stadium. We narrowly lost a very tight match 1-0 in front of a crowd of 2,225 that night. A fine season was ended, but what memories it brought.

What does 2024/25 hold, a new revamped side, and a manager and coaching squad with that extra years experience. Looking forward to the journey.

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DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

Dartford Football Club has a rich and fascinating history dating back well over 130 years. Currently playing in the Isthmian Premier League, the club has competed in the top tier of non-league football on three separate occasions, with its highest finish, third. The Club has reached the third round of the FA Cup on several occasions, the FA Trophy final once and has won the Kent Senior Cup 14 times, with only Maidstone United winning it more.

The story begins – Dartford Football Club was formed in early 1888 by members of the Dartford Workingmen's club and for the first few seasons, played only friendly fixtures with the occasional foray into cup football. A run to the final of the Kent Senior cup in 1894 encouraged the club committee to enter Dartford as a founder-member of the Kent League for the 1894-95 season. Dartford played its first match in the FA Cup in October 1895. Two seasons later, Dartford became founder-members of the Southern League, Division Two, winning the Championship at the first attempt. Over the next few seasons Dartford fluctuated between the Southern and Kent Leagues but a financial crisis in the early 1900s saw the club drift down to the West Kent League. At the same time, the club, which had used several pitches in the area, gained the use of Summers Meadow in Lowfield Street on a long lease.

In 1908-09, Dartford won both the West Kent League and Cup 'double' and generated enough enthusiasm for the club to re-join the Kent League, retaining membership until the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War. In 1913, Dartford undertook a short tour of Norway, which ended with a 6-1 win over a Norway XI. After the war, football in the town was slow to get underway as the Summers Meadow ground was no longer available. However, local businessmen appreciating the value of a good-class football team bearing the town's name, completely re-structured the club and, from 1921 onwards, Dartford FC was run as a public limited liability company, unique in English football until Tottenham Hotspur followed suit some fifty years later. A site was found in Watling Street in the neighbouring parish of Stone, which was to remain the club's home until a major financial crisis forced the sale of the ground in 1992.

Darts continued their association with the Kent league, winning the league cup in 1923-24, before switching to the Southern League in time for the 1926-27 season. At the start of the 1930s, the Dartford Board appointed the successful Kettering Town manager, Bill Collier, as manager. The Scot continued his pattern of success with Dartford and won trophies by the shoal-load during the decade leading up to the 1939-45 War. Dartford won the Southern League Eastern section title in 1930-31 and 1931-32 (missing a hat-trick by just one point the season after) and the overall Championship of the League was won with victories over the Western Section winners Exeter City Reserves 7-2 away and Yeovil & Petters United 2-1 at home, respectively. In county football, Dartford won the Kent Senior Cup four times in five seasons and the Kent Senior Shield three times.

In addition, Dartford gained a reputation nationally by becoming the first club outside the Football League to reach the FA Cup Third Round Proper in successive seasons. In 1935-36, Dartford lost to a star-studded Derby County (then second in Division One) by 3-2 at the Baseball Ground having led 2-0. Leading player Fred Dell was transferred to West Ham for a reported £2,000 immediately after the game. The following season saw Dartford lose 1-0 at home to Darlington at the same stage. Towards the end of the decade Mr Collier, who had brought a distinctive Scottish flavour to Dartford, resigned to take over a business in Scotland and the period was seen out in a comparatively quiet vein.

Post-War stability – For a decade and a half following the 1939-1945 War, Dartford had little to show for its efforts apart from a sparkling Kent Senior Cup win over Bromley in 1947. At the same time, Bromley vied with Bishop Auckland as the premier amateur club in the land and the Lillywhites took a 2-0 lead in the final before Dartford struck back with three goals to lift the trophy. Included in the Dartford line-up that day was Ted Croker, later to become the Secretary of the Football Association. Soon after this win Dartford transferred Riley Cullum and Fred Alexander to Charlton Athletic for £6,000, which wiped out the club's debts entirely. Dartford's first post-war manager was Warney Creswell (ex-Everton and England) but poor results led to him being rapidly

DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

replaced by Bill Moss who gradually put some stability into the club's playing performances. In the late 1950s, the Southern League was totally reorganised and Dartford spent most of the ensuing twenty seasons in the Premier Division. The key managers of the era were George Green, Alf Ackerman and Ernie Morgan, each of whom brought extensive Football League experience to the club resulting in a reasonable level of respectability to the playing side affairs.

In the early 1970s, Dartford appeared in four successive Kent Senior Cup finals, winning the first and the last. Around this time, the club acquired the services of ex-Bolton and England winger Doug Holden as manager. Doug laid down the foundations of the team, which won the Southern League Championship in 1973/74. Holden left before the start of that season and was replaced by Ernie Morgan who grafted 3 or 4 quality players on to Holden's squad and steered the Darts to the Southern League title and a place in the FA Trophy final at Wembley (losing 2-1 to Morecambe). For the next few seasons, Dartford drifted along and just failed to clinch a spot in the newly formed Alliance Premier League (not the Football Conference). Even though the period was barren by Dartford's standards, the club did win the Southern League Cup for the 1st time in 1976/77.

The 80s: a rollercoaster ride to sweet success – Then came the 1980s, a period dominated by two managers with contrasting styles: John Still and Peter Taylor. By winning the Southern Division of the Southern League in 1980-81, Dartford had gained a short-lived place in the Alliance Premier League. Relegated after just one season, but having tasted life at the top of the semi-professional game, Dartford wanted more. John Still, who had led Leytonstone/Ilford to a clean sweep of trophies, was the man for the job. In 1983-84, he steered Dartford to a fourth Southern League Championship and a return to the Alliance Premier League (by now known as the Gola League). This time Darts stayed two seasons, finishing third in 1984-85. Another periodic crisis was looming, and with Still departing in February 1986, Dartford were relegated once again.

In the summer of 1986, former Tottenham and England winger Peter Taylor took charge of the club. In the four seasons of his reign, Dartford were never out of the top four in the Southern League Premier Division, won the Southern League Cup twice (and were denied a unique hat-trick by VS Rugby in the 1989-90 final), the Southern League Championship Trophy twice, the Kent Senior Cup twice and reached the FA Trophy semi-finals, twice. In each of his four seasons at Dartford the team scored over one hundred goals – a feat unmatched until Tony Burman's side in 2007/08. In addition, Taylor saw average attendances rise from around 450 to almost 1,000.

Supporters' Association save the Club – In the wake of the Bradford fire and the Hillsborough disaster Dartford, like so many clubs, needed to either re-locate or upgrade their facilities with the Board going for the latter option. Large sums of money were spent on planning and design fees, which burdened a manageable financial deficit with crippling interest charges. At the same time Maidstone United, who had sold their own ground, needed a suitable home to launch their ill-fated foray into the Football League and the Dartford board agreed to let Maidstone ground-share at Watling Street, the rent income providing a welcome boost for finances.

Within a few years, Maidstone had gone into liquidation, most of their cash being taken up to gain the eagerly-sought Football League place. Ground improvements, which Maidstone United had paid for, were sold to Dartford at a cost (around £500,000), which pushed Darts' debts beyond manageable proportions. Watling Street was sold to pay off creditors and Dartford withdrew from the Southern League four games into the 1992-93 season.

The club's Supporters' Association, around 400 strong, came to the rescue, with a private limited liability company incorporated in November 1992 to manage affairs. This meant, primarily, keeping the Youth team operating, an action which was rewarded when the Youth team beat Maidstone Invicta (the club rising out of the ashes of the old United Club) in the final of the John Ullman cup by 2-0 at Gravesend & Northfleet before a

DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

gate of 562. The continuing existence of the Youth team enabled Dartford to maintain both its Senior status and full membership of the Football Association.

In February 1993, former player Tony Burman was appointed Manager and with the club being offered a ground-share arrangement by Cray Wanderers, Dartford were able to make a successful application for membership of the Kent League. Spurred on by an average attendance of well over 300, Dartford finished that first season in sixth position. With a view to the future Dartford negotiated a ground-share with Erith & Belvedere in time for the 1994-95 season and a second Kent League campaign started with gates at a shade over 400. Early promise faded somewhat and the club finished in mid-table, but they did reach the final of the Kent League Cup.

The following season saw Dartford involved in a season-long battle with Furness for the Division One title, with the destination of the championship decided in the gloom at Furness in the last fixture of the season, the home side clinging on for a 1-1 draw to deny Dartford on goal difference. The season was remarkable in that Darts lost only one league game all season. The one defeat in all competitions came at Conference club Farnborough Town in the FA Cup, the only goal coming from the penalty spot. There were triumphs, though, as Dartford swept to a 3-0 Kent Senior Trophy victory over Chatham Town at Welling United FC, whilst the newly formed reserves, under another former Dart – Gary Julians – carried off a South London Federation League and Cup ‘double’ and the youth team finished in third position in the Kent Youth League. In May 1996 came the welcome news that Dartford had gained promotion to the Dr Martens sponsored Southern League, exactly one hundred years after the club first entered that competition. Unfortunately, Tony Burman was forced to resign as manager in the December due to business commitments but the club quickly promoted reserve team manager Gary Julians to first team manager.

After an initial bright start to the season, which saw Dartford reach third place, the season settled down and the Darts finished fourteenth. The Reserves had another excellent season and finished second to Tonbridge Reserves in the Kent League Division Two. In September 1997, a disastrous fire at Erith & Belvedere put the club's future and standing with the Southern League into serious doubt and with this in mind a new ground sharing arrangement was made with Purfleet in time for the 1998-99 season. A highlight of that season were the achievements of the Youth team under the guidance of Grant Spelling and Simon Halsey. The team won the Northern Section title after a penalty shootout in a play-off with Welling United, and also reached the final of the Kent Youth League Cup and the Kent County Cup.

The 1999-2000 season saw the Darts reach the semi-final of the Kent Senior Cup and the reserves reach the same stage of the Kent Intermediate Cup. The following three seasons saw the team consolidate in the Dr Martens League, finishing mid-table on each occasion with the exception of 1999-2000, when the Darts finished in eighth position. A new ground sharing agreement was arranged with Gravesend & Northfleet in time for the 2001-02 season. In November 2001 the club parted company with both Manager Gary Julians and Coach Micky Crower. Former manager and player Tony Burman returned to the club as caretaker manager to be assisted by former captain and player Paul Sawyer.

Dartford were by now languishing in a relegation position and December 2001 saw the announcement that Tommy Sampson, who had played over 200 games for Dartford during the five-year period 1975-80, had been appointed the new manager. He was assisted by Martin Farnie and Paul Sawyer and in early 2002 long time Dartford favourite Steve Robinson returned to the club as reserve team player-manager. Many changes were to follow on the playing front and by the end of the season Dartford had finished in a very credible eighth position and in doing so were the highest placed Kent club in the Dr Martens Eastern Division. The reserves too, had a very good season, winning the Northern section of Kent League Division One.

In a play-off for the overall winners of Division One, the Darts missed the title in an extra-time loss to Dover Athletic Reserves. The ground sharing agreement at Gravesend & Northfleet, coupled with an upturn in

DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

performances on the field, saw a significant increase in attendances to help the financial position of the club. Season 2002-03 saw a further expansion of the playing side, with the addition of an Under 16s side in the Kent Youth League, thus making the progression of players from Under 16s level to the senior squad possible. The decision paid off as the team achieved a league and cup double. The Under 18s team also achieved runners-up position in the Central Division.

Season 2003-04 saw the first team finish in 16th position in the Dr Martens Eastern Division, but the news that everybody had been waiting for came on the 10th April 2004 with Dartford Borough Council announcing that it would provide funding and a site for the building of a stadium in Dartford in time for the 2006-07 season. The 2004/5 season saw the restructuring of non-league football. Dartford remained in the Southern League in a division made up of largely teams from the Ryman League. The season as a whole was disappointing with the Darts on the edge of the relegation zone for much of the season. Manager Tommy Sampson left the club towards the end of January and director and former player and manager Tony Burman, took over on a caretaker basis.

An early upsurge in results pulled the Darts away from the relegation zone to retain their Southern League status. Meanwhile, the Reserves under the managership of Bob Pittaway, improved on the previous season's poor performances. An influx of players previously under Bob's guidance at Tonbridge and several youth team players from the previous seasons Under 18s, helped the team achieve a creditable mid-table position. The bright side of the season for the club was the performance of the club's two youth teams. At the beginning of the season, Dennis Reid was appointed manager following a previously successful time at youth team level at Gravesend & Northfleet.

Joining him was Cengiz Ibrahim as coach. Several ex-Gravesend & Northfleet players followed them and achieved the best season at Under 18s level for many seasons. The season culminated with them winning the Kent Youth League Under 18 Central Division title and also achieving the double by winning the Plaaya sponsored Kent Youth Under 18 Cup. The Under 13s team under manager Mick Knight and coach Gary Whitehead took a while to settle down but went on to end the season in mid-table and also to win the Under 13s Challenge Cup. A game that was a credit to youth football. The team also achieved joint winners with five other clubs in the Sportsmanship Awards at the League's AGM by not having any players cautioned during the season. Season 2005/6 proved to be an exciting period for the club both on and off the field. The Youth side of the club expanded to have teams competing at Under 18, 16, 14 and 13 level. Dartford Vikings who were previously affiliated to the club joined forces with the Darts, bringing with them a further 12 teams from Under 17s down to Under 7s.

New ground news rejuvenates the Club – Off the field, the decision every Darts fan had been waiting for came on Wednesday 13 July 2005 when Dartford Council passed the planning application for the new ground subject to no objections being raised by the Highway Agency or the archaeological survey. During the summer of 2005, Tony Burman decided that he would continue as manager for the forthcoming season to be assisted by Paul Sawyer and Steve Robinson. Expectations were high within the club with the anticipated start of the building of the new stadium and these expectations were fulfilled when in November 2005 contractors moved onto the new site and building commenced.

On the field, the Darts started brightly and early form saw them in the top half of the table and a position that they would maintain for the whole season. An early exit in the FA Cup saw Darts dismal run in this competition continue. However, the club had its best run in the FA Trophy for several seasons. Wins over Dover Athletic and Margate brought the draw everybody was looking forward to, at home at AFC Wimbledon. The game at Stonebridge Road, saw an end-to-end encounter, but at the end of ninety minutes the score was goalless and a replay at Wimbledon scheduled the following Tuesday. Another pulsating game and just when extra time loomed, Wimbledon broke the deadlock to score two goals in the last five minutes.

DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

A disastrous spell just after Christmas saw the Darts go on a losing trail, although the leading clubs remained within touching distance. James Carter's absence from the squad from January was a major setback, but the Darts recruited Brendon Cass from Chatham Town to bolster the forward line. The final positions in the league were not to be decided until the last day of the season and depended on Dartford's and Wivenhoe Town's results on the day. Whilst Darts did the business by winning at Barton Rovers, Wivenhoe secured the point they needed to book a play-off position. The Reserves under Bob Pittaway started with a mixture of new players and those that had progressed through from the Under 18s Championship team of the season before. Without a settled team due to injuries and call ups to the first team, the team struggled and December saw the departure of Reserve team manager Bob Pittaway and his assistants to Sevenoaks Town. As a temporary measure Grant Spelling agreed to return to the club to help out until a permanent appointment could be found.

This temporary arrangement turned permanent when Grant continued in that position until the end of the season. During that time the Reserves had a much more settled team and improved performances saw them finish in a top half position in the league when early indications were that they were relegation candidates – and saw them reach the final of the Division One/Two cup. The final played at Folkestone Invicta's ground, saw a thoroughly entertaining game of football which was a credit to both teams but which saw the Darts winners at the end of ninety minutes by three goals to one.

There were mixed fortunes for the club's youth teams. The Under 18s had a new blend of players from those left from the previous season, plus newcomers to the club but were unable to repeat the feats of the previous season and finished mid-table and without any great cup success. The Under 16s however won their league and also finished runners up in the League Shield, whilst the Under 14s consolidated on their previous season by finishing mid-table. There was success for the Under 13s, winning the league title but missing out on a league and cup double by losing on penalties to a strong Bromley side. By the end of the season, the FA's restructuring plan was being implemented which saw the Darts moved from the Southern League to the Ryman League where they would compete in the Ryman Division One South. Manager Tony Burman kept faith with the majority of the previous season's team, but reinforced the squad with the addition of experienced defenders John Farley, Lew Watts, and forward Jay May.

Off the field, Princes Park was taking shape and an opening date of 23 September was announced for the first game. Towards the end of April, it became apparent that this date would not be met and on Monday 21 August 2006 it was announced that the opening date would be Saturday 11 November 2006 when the Darts entertained Horsham YMCA in the Ryman League.

New horizons with Princes Park opening – The day duly arrived and in front of a capacity crowd of 4,100 (all tickets sold in 3 weeks) the team won 4-2 with Brendon Cass having the honour of scoring the first goal after 10 minutes. Dartford were moved across to the Ryman League Division One North for the 2007/2008 season. After a long battle with AFC Sudbury at the top (including a long unbeaten run for the Darts mid-season), Dartford were crowned Champions despite a 2-1 defeat away at Edware Town. Princes Park celebrated the victory with a victory over Wingate and Finchley in the final match of 2007/2008, where club captain Alex O'Brien lifted the league title.

Dartford finished a credible 8th in the Ryman Premier League in their first season back, whilst selling striker Cody McDonald to Norwich City in the January 2009 transfer window. The Darts continued their progress through the football pyramid since returning to the Borough throughout the 2009/10 season, although cup football was not the biggest of successes. An FA Cup run ended at the hands of Chelmsford City in October, and was followed up by defeats by Dover Athletic (FA Trophy), Aveley (Isthmian League Cup) and Welling United (Kent Senior Cup). However, league competition was seen as paramount and this showed. Dartford sealed the league title only a fortnight before the end of the season with a thumping 6-2 victory at Kingstonian, but this did not show the full story as a bad winter left the Darts with seven games in that final spell. Victories in all but one of these matches left the club winning the title by an 18-point margin eventually.

In 2010/11, the club made their debut in the Conference South, finishing a creditable tenth. In contrast to the previous season, cup runs were on the agenda, with an extended FA Cup run the highlight. Dartford eventually succumbed to Port Vale in a replay, with Vale's late equaliser at Princes Park feeling particularly harsh given the context of the match. There was also a good FA Trophy run which ended in a last sixteen match at Conference National club Gateshead, who ran out winners. There was success in the Kent Senior Cup when the club lifted the trophy for the first time since the late 1980s with a 4-1 victory over Bromley at Princes Park in the final.

DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

Top Tier again at last – In 2011/12, it was another season of twists and turns, as the Darts crashed out of the FA Cup early with a defeat at Bromley, and fell in the 3rd Round of the FA Trophy to Wealdstone after a replay. The Kent Senior Cup defence ended at the final hurdle, losing out to Hythe Town in the Final, but the league form was the most important part of the season. Chasing down Woking throughout the season, the Darts eventually lost out by four points and sealed the second-place position, and more importantly home advantage in the play-offs. Beating Basingstoke Town over the two-legged affair meant a home match against Welling United in the final. The sell-out crowd saw Lee Noble's early strike seal the Darts place as Promotion Final Winners and earning a slot in the National Conference for the first time since the 1980s.

The Club's return to the top flight of Non-League Football in 2012/13 will also be long remembered for being one of the most successful seasons in its history. Despite a controversial expulsion from the Kent Senior Cup, and the unfortunate drawing of a fellow Conference National side in the club's first FA Cup match (Forest Green Rovers), the club managed to reach the FA Trophy Semi Finals. Defeats of Kingstonian, Tonbridge Angels, Bromley and Halifax Town took the Darts to a two-legged tie against fellow Conference side Grimsby Town. A 3-0 defeat at Blundell Park possibly flattered the home side, but it left the Darts with a mountain to climb back at Princes Park, where they could only manage a 0-0 draw to get so near, yet so far from a trip to Wembley. However, despite the cup run, the Darts' league form managed to stand up, against all odds. An eighth-place finish was the culmination of some excellent victories, defeating Hereford United, Wrexham, Luton Town, Cambridge United and Grimsby Town as well as a televised home win over the eventual champions Mansfield Town. Finishing the highest part-time side in the country was topped off by Princes Park hosting its 1st international match as England C hosted Turkey C.

The following two seasons were hard work for the Club. In 2013/14, Dartford lost their defensive spine of Champion, Bonner and Arber. Despite away wins at Kidderminster and Wrexham, relegation was confirmed. However, due to financial mismanagement by other clubs in the League, two relegation spaces were removed. Dartford were in those two spaces, and in the middle of June, it was confirmed that the Darts had been handed a reprieve. The late notice of this however worked against the Darts as plans had been put in place to sign players who could not commit to Conference National football. It was no surprise to see the club struggle. Away wins against Wrexham and Chester papered over a poor record away from home, and a televised home defeat against Barnet on Easter Monday condemned the Darts to relegation, with no reprieve this time. Cup football in these two seasons had a mixed success. In 2014/15, the Darts made it through to the Second Round of the FA Cup when they were beaten 4-1 by Bradford City at Valley Parade.

Following the club's relegation from the National League (formerly the Conference), there was a return to National League South football. An early exit in the FA Cup at home to lower league Uxbridge was a bitter disappointment, as was the early defeat in the FA Trophy at home to Whitehawk. The league campaign ended with the Darts just outside of the play-offs, with a slender but improbable chance going into the final match of the season. It was, however, not to be. There was cup success though, as the Darts lifted the Kent Senior Cup with a final at Princes Park against Charlton Athletic who they defeated 3-1.

The following season, victories against Chelmsford City, Slough Town and Tonbridge Angels in the FA Cup took the Darts into the First Round with a tie against National League side Sutton United at Princes Park. The Darts, however, came out on the wrong side of a 6-3 defeat in an enthralling match in which the home side came from behind three times. Sutton United would go on to be knocked out by Arsenal in the competition. In the FA Trophy, Chelmsford City gained revenge for the FA Cup defeat by beating the Darts 1-0. The league season was one of nearly but not quite, however. Two late goals against Poole Town sealed third place in the League, and confirmed a two-legged tie against Chelmsford City (making a total of six matches against them in the season). The Darts managed to hold them 0-0 in the away leg, but a 2-1 defeat was enough to knock the Darts out in the second leg. Following the disappointment of missing out on the play-offs, 2017/18 started off with the Darts conceding only three goals in the first six matches. Victories in the FA Cup against Barking, Needham Market & Burgess Hill Town saw the Darts reach the First Round of the competition for the second year in a row. A home tie against Swindon Town was the reward, but the League opposition came out victors in a 5-1 win.

An early exit from the Kent Senior Cup and subsequent defeat on penalties against Boreham Wood in the FA Trophy meant that the deck was cleared for a full-throated assault on the League title. The Darts went undefeated from just before Christmas to early February. However, consecutive defeats proved to be a setback. Havant & Waterlooville were the Club's main rivals for the National League South, and the title race would run down to the final match. The Darts lost only once from the 10th February until the 28th April, winning nine consecutive matches at the tail end of that run. Havant & Waterlooville went into the final match of the season ahead on goal difference, with the Darts' needing to score goals and match the result of the Hawks. With Tony Burman's men winning at Bognor Regis, Havant & Waterlooville were level with Concord Rangers which meant that the Darts were in pole position to win the League until the 87th minute. Former Dart Jason Prior scored a late winner which condemned DFC to missing out on goal difference, and having to take their chance in the Play-offs. Taking on Braintree Town,

DARTFORD CLUB HISTORY

who finished 17 points behind DFC, the team were defeated 1-0, and in the days following the match, Tony Burman resigned his position as First Team Manager, with his management team following him.

The summer of 2018 saw upheaval at the Club following the resignations, but DFC appointed their first joint-managers in its history in late May, with former players Jamie Coyle and Adam Flanagan taking the helm. A mixed start to the season followed a disrupted pre-season, where the Club lost Andy Pugh to a horrific double leg break, and the lack of goals showed, scoring three goals in the first six matches. This was compounded by only one victory in the FA Cup, a laboured 3-1 win at AFC Uckfield Town, before being knocked out by Oxford City in the Third Qualifying Round. However, five wins in six matches brightened spirits before an early exit from the FA Trophy at the hands of Eastbourne Borough, following a replay. Throughout the winter though, inconsistency plagued the Club until February, when the Darts lowered the colours, twice, of the soon to be champions Woking as well as Bath City. With the play-offs looking a distinct possibility, the inconsistency crept back in and unfortunately, only one win in the final eight matches of the season meant that the Club missed out on the final play-off place.

COVID strikes, but Club battles on – The 19-20 season started poorly and after a September loss to Tonbridge Angels the management team of Coyle and Flanagan, resigned. Steve King was appointed in October, with his first match – an FA Cup game – ending in defeat. However, the team fared better in the league, with King's men finishing in sixth – up from 16th when he began his role. With Covid now impacting life and football across the world, the Play-off semi-final against Chelmsford took place behind closed doors. A win took the Darts to the final which they lost 3-0 to Weymouth. Government and local authority grants, as well as Furlough money, helped Dartford pull through this tricky period with the 20-21 season not beginning until October. Restrictions were lifted to allow club officials and directors into the ground, but with a second wave rocking the country, the season was curtailed in Feb 21, with Dartford top or second for most of the season.

For 21-22, crowds were back and the Darts were challenging from the start. The Kent Senior Cup Final took place from the season before with a thrilling 6-1 win against Whitstable Town. An FA Trophy run saw the team lose to Needham Market in the fifth round, with a fourth-place finish in the league. Sadly, the team lost its semi-final play-off to Chippenham on penalties. It did, however, win the Kent Senior Cup against Folkestone 6-2. Steve King was let go, with Alan Dowson appointed for the start of the 22-23 season. The 22-23 started well, with the team reaching the top spot in November after beating Welling 5-1. The team remained in second or third spot all season with wins of 4-1 away and 4-0 at home against Ebbsfleet among the highlights. Ebbsfleet went on to win the league title by 20 points, with Darts finishing in second and losing the play-off semi-final to St Albans City on penalties.

Pennock takes charge and rings in the changes – The 23-24 saw the team struggle, with Alan Dowson let go in January. Tony Burnham took charge, but results did not improve and Ady Pennock – a former Gillingham FC player and manager – took charge for the final 10 games. His appointment would prove to be too late, with the team ending the season relegated to the Isthmian Premier League. For 24-25, Pennock swept in the changes, effectively bringing in a whole new team for the beginning of the season and putting his trust in the successful Academy, with eight players making the step up to first team football.

DARTFORD PLAYER PROFILES

Jacob Marsden (Goalkeeper) – Jacob joined in the close season from Chelmsford City. Early career was the youth team at Ipswich Town. During his time with them he had a spell on loan to Leiston making 25 first team appearances. Following his release from Ipswich Jacob joined St Ives and then Mildenhall before moving to Scotland to join Hamilton Academicals for one season. Returning to England Jacob joined Needham Market before joining Chelmsford in September 2020 where in May 2023 Jacob was appointed goalkeeper coach.

Sam Odaudu (Defender) – A product of the Dartford Academy, Sam made various loan spells on loan at Margate before breaking into the Dartford first team becoming a regular for the 2023/24 season. Injury prevented Sam from making more appearances but has already started over 50 first team appearances.

Samir Carruthers (Midfield) – Samir has rejoined the Darts from Chelmsford City where he made 38 first team appearances last season. Samir originally signed for the Darts on loan from Hemel Hempstead Town in March 2022 making the loan permanent for the following season. Samir started with Arsenal U18 before joining the likes of Aston Villa, Sheffield United, MK Dons, Oxford United and Cambridge United before dropping into non-league football.

Josh Hill (Centre Back) – Rejoined the Darts for the third time this season from Hemel Hempstead Town. Josh brings a wealth of non-league football to Princes Park having played for clubs such as Boreham Wood, Wealdstone, Havant & Waterlooville, Braintree Town and Welling United. Club captain.

George Whitefield (Defender) – The third Academy product who broke into the Dartford first team with an impressive debut in the last game of the season before last at Hampton & Richmond. Has made nine first team appearances up to the start of this season.

Callum Jones (Striker) – The third of Dartford's signings from Chelmsford City. Callum's early career was at Colchester United's Academy where he had worked through the club's U18 and U21 teams. Callum left United in June 2021 to sign for Chelmsford City where he made 70 first team appearances. Also had a loan spell at Braintree Town.

DARTFORD PLAYER PROFILES

Denzelle Olopade (Midfield) – Denzelle’s youth career began at the Norwich City Academy later to join the Crystal Palace Under 18 in July 2019. Following his departure from Palace Denzelle linked up with Ramsgate, Phoenix Sports and Erith & Belvedere before joining the Darts in the close season.

Duane Ofori-Acheampong (Striker) – Vastly experienced non-league striker has rejoined the Darts from Torquay United after six seasons away from Princes Park. Since leaving Dartford Duane has been at Woking, Braintree Town, Hungerford and then Torquay from whom he joined the Darts. In his first period with the Darts Duane scored 9 goals in 56 appearances.

Ollie Box (Striker) – Another player who has progressed for the Dartford Academy and broke into the Dartford first team last season making 19 first team appearances of which 12 were in the starting eleven. Another player to have had a loan spell at Margate.

Sam Okoye (Defender) – Joined the Darts in the summer having impressed in pre-season training and in friendlies. Was at Hastings United last season.

Luther Williams (Defender) – Originally at Chelsea at youth level before moving to Sheffield United to play at U18 and U21 level. Joined Leatherhead at the start of the 2023/24 season.

Tyler Christian-Law (Midfield) – Experienced non-league midfielder who joins the Darts having been with Hornchurch last season where he made 14 appearances in their promotion winning side. Tyler joined them from Hastings United in November 2023. Tyler commenced his career at Wealdstone later to play at Braintree, Potters Bar, Horsham and then Hastings United.

Eddie Dsane (Striker) – Experienced striker whose early youth career was at Crystal Palace, Preston North End and Fleetwood. After a spell in Ireland with Longford and Finn Harps, Eddie returned to England to play non-league football at amongst others Chipstead, Leatherhead, Margate and Horsham. Joined the Darts at the beginning of this season having been at Kingstonian last season.

Louis Dunne (Midfield) – Joined the Darts on a three-month loan from Chelmsford City.

DARTFORD PLAYER PROFILES

Gabe Campbell (Forward) – Gabe has joined the Darts after impressing in pre-season friendlies and training, recommended to the Darts manager by Samie Carruthers who spotted Gabe at the football academy where he is a coach.

Michael Olarewaju (Midfield) – Recent signing having been at Eastbourne Borough Athletic and Dover Athletic last season.

Hayden Bullas (Midfield) – Joined the Darts on a two-month loan from Leyton Orient.

The following members of the Dartford Academy have been promoted to the first team squad for the forthcoming season

Jay Pinder (Defender)

Joseph Kpaka (Midfield)

Josh Atkinson (Goalkeeper)

Blu Husthwaite (Midfield)

Dean Naylor (Defender)

Ashdon Day (Forward)

Todd Brand (Midfield)

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Billy Cracknell

Jaiden Drakes-Thomes

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Fergal Hale-Brown

Loic Hernandez

Arthur Iontton

Cain Keller

Alex Kpakpe

Ryan Lowe

Zack Newton

Tommy Roberts

Ogo Obi

Ferdinand Oko

Camilo Restrepo

Ayo Tanimowo

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Benjamin Watt

Bobby Webb



Manager: Adrian Pennock

Assistant manager: Roland Edhe

Goalkeeping Coach: Les Cleevely

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Doctor: Richard Dunn

Josh Atkinson (GK)

Ollie Box

Todd Brand

Hayden Bullas

Gabe Campbell

Samir Carruthers

Tyler Chrisian-Law

Ashdon Day

Eddie Dsane

Louis Dunne

Josh Hill

Blu Busthwaite

Callum Jones

Joseph Kpaka

Jacob Marsden (GK)

Dean Naylor

Sam Odadu

Duane Ofori-Acheampong

Same Okoye

Michael Olarewaju

Denzelle Olopade

Jay Pinder

George Whitefield

Luther Williams

NEXT UP IN N12:

Hendon (ILP) – 25/01/2025

Cray Wanderers (ILP) – 28/01/2025

MATCH OFFICIALS

Referee: Richard Wharton

Assistants: Philip Evans, Robert Poole