

TT No.3: *Mark Rose* - Saturday 14th July 2007; **Dartford** v Spurs XI; Pre-Season Friendly; Res: 2-7; Att: 2395; Admission: £5; Prog: £1.50; Pizza: £2 (boxed!); Fare: £6.20 (Travelcard extension and taxi).

No time to research the history of Dartford I'm afraid - my only knowledge of it extends to the fact that the border of Essex and Kent lies across the fairly new Dartford Toll Bridge.

A relatively short journey from London Bridge saw me reach Dartford station within half an hour or so, but still a little later than planned. This was due to the fact that I had forgotten to take directions to the ground with me and so I ventured into a taxi which was just as well as kick-off was fast approaching.

The taxi went up a steep hill and pulled into what looked like a leisure complex, next to a sports centre. It wasn't until I walked right to the top of the hill that I saw the ground in front of me.

Dartford only moved into Princes Park in 2006 and, for a team that plays in the Ryman Premier League (Division One South), it's a very impressive stadium. It holds about 4,500 and is known as the "Eco-Friendly Stadium." It's unlike any ground that I can recall seeing before. It is enclosed and each stand is supported by a wooden tier held up by metal poles. The top of each tier is covered in grass (although this is only visible in the air and was only brought to my attention by the picture on the front of the programme). Each side of the ground encompasses a terrace behind which is a spacious walk-way all around the ground, supported by the said tiers. In between is a luscious green pitch. It's almost as if someone has created an enormous rectangular box, covered it in grass, and cut a rectangular hole in the middle leaving the ground within. It's quite an amazing sight.

On a warm July evening Dartford played host to a Spurs XI in a pre-season friendly. As a Spurs fan, Spurs XI games fall into an odd category. They're not first team games but they're not quite reserve games either. Teams are made up of first team, reserve team and even youth team players; in this case the players were virtually all from the latter two categories.

In an entertaining game the Spurs XI raced to a 6-0 half-time lead. However, Dartford had their chances, most notably hitting the post and woodwork in the first half and both goalkeepers had many saves to make. The second half was a more even affair and a final score-line of 7-2 to the Spurs XI was perhaps a little harsh on the Dartford first team. Indeed, I cannot remember a game where the woodwork was hit so many times and also a match in which so many long-range shots were attempted. There seemed to be a game within a game of who can beat the goalkeeper from the longest distance...

It took nearly two and a half hours to get home, as is the nature of public transport, involving a train, a tube, a DLR, another train and then a rail

replacement bus service. I arrived home at 00:10; next time I'll try to scrounge a lift!!

06/20