

## **London FA Representative Youth Teams Report**

**2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019**

We have had quite a difficult time off the pitch in starting the season. The trials in both age groups were later than anticipated, due to a number of reasons but certainly the cost and availability of facilities being the key issue. We have struggled to obtain 3G training facilities because we do not block book as clubs do. Likewise we have struggled to get appropriate facilities for the matches this season. We have lost our long term option of Tooting and Mitcham as it is hired out to a women's team on Sunday. We were able to secure Bromley FC for our FA Cup match and hoped to use it for the league game with Jersey but again because of a late women's fixture we were left with no venue two weeks before the game with Jersey having booked their flights. Fortunately for us Tooting and Mitcham accommodated us on that occasion. We have two more home games and we have booked them with Cray Valley FC, and the first of them against Jersey went very well in terms of the venue. Cray Valley has always been good supported of County football on and off the pitch.

We have found a suitable training facility at Bishop Justus School in Bromley and have books some sessions there until Christmas, hopefully they will accommodate our final few sessions in January and February.

On the field we have done well in the circumstances. Our first match in the FA Cup against Devon did not go well. We started with 16 players who had never played a match as a team and it showed. While our opposition in the cup always come in off the back of 3 or 4 friendlies we had none and only two training sessions before the match. We were three nil down in fifteen minutes and finally lost 6-2. The second game we played showed a substantial improvement. Richard and Neville had worked with the players for four weeks and brought in some new faces. We were a more organised and resilient side against Essex. To be fair to Essex they were a very strong side and we edged the game with a 1-0 win from a goal from our centre back Josh Crispin from a set piece. Richard had a full bench and every player he brought on fitted in and played with discipline. Our next game against Jersey was again a close game which we lost 2-1. It was disappointing that we lost but the loss was in reality down to a slow start in the game and conceding an early penalty. The Jersey side were more experienced than us and it did show in their intelligence as a side but we did play well in second half and the team are competitive this year.

Our Under 16's started with a lot going against them in the match with Jersey, again Francis only had two sessions before the game and played no preseason friendlies. Richard assisted him on the day and between them they got us off to a winning start with a 1-0 win in a close game against Jersey FA. It is a promising group of players and we had one or two players in from different clubs which is good to see. We do have a short season with the Under 16's, only three games in the league and if we finish top we go to the final against the winner of the northern group.

Financially we have kept close to target, we did save a bit on trials which we have reinvested in training. It is frustrating for the managers and in particular for me as secretary the hardship we experience if getting facilities. While I am sure our budget is not that different from other counties what we can do is much less. The price and availability of facilities in London is killing us. It would be nice to receive support from clubs especially around training because obviously we do not have a county ground. It would be good to see sites we have secured funding for offering us support.

Likewise we have no sponsors again this season which puts us at a great disadvantage to our competitors who have raised substantial funding. Last season we could not afford to buy players caps although we have a provision in this year's budget. I am sure there are many companies who would sponsor our kits through the association.

The issue we do need to address is the recruitment of a new Secretary. My term will come to an end as we complete this season and while I don't mind supporting a new secretary over the next season we urgently need to recruit somebody. It is an ideal opportunity to review how other counties do so much better than us and install a new person and new process together. As one of the few investments in youth football, and in particular boys football, it is a pity not to make the best of the opportunity it provides. We have some outstanding players in London and yet we persistently come up short against smaller and poorer counties whose model is better.

John Plummer

Youth Representative Secretary

2<sup>nd</sup> December