



Sussex U18's vs. Buckinghamshire Schools U18's

Date: 22.10.14
Venue: Waterhall 3G
Competition: SEESFA League
Result: 4-1

Match Report:

Sussex Schools U18's began their season with a SEESFA League match at home to Buckinghamshire Schools U18's at Waterhall 3G, Brighton. Existing Joint Manager was joined by Jude MacDonald in the summer after Luke Hampton's departure to Hampshire and both were looking for a positive start to the season.

This was the first time that Sussex had met Buckinghamshire since Hall has been part of the Sussex set up, however a 1-1 draw against Essex in their first game of the season shows that this squad would provide a tough test for Sussex and their new look squad.

No fewer than 7 first year players were in the starting line up with only keeper Jimmy Punter, Matt Smith and Harry Shooman being part of last season's squad. The focus early on was to keep the shape, be organised, but get at the opposition early and this is what Sussex did, not letting their opponents get a foothold in the game. Sussex took the lead inside 10 minutes. A well worked corner routine saw Ben Pope (BHASVIC) peel off the goalkeeper and head home from a Mike Waller (Steyning) delivery. 1-0.

Lucas Rodrigues (City College Brighton) was causing havoc on the left hand side and should have been awarded a penalty after getting inside his full back only for the referee to wave away his protests. Sussex doubled their lead with a simple, yet well taken finish. Ross Edwards (Worthing College) played a first time ball over the Buckinghamshire centre backs and Pope's clever run allowed him to lob the onrushing goalkeeper. 2-0.

To their credit Buckinghamshire were extremely workmanlike and had technically gifted players, however the back four of Harry Shooman (City College Brighton), Smith (Worthing College), Pablo Barralles (Buckswood School) and Nathan Hawker (Felpham College) were in control and looking to start attacks with their forward passing. Barralles almost got himself a debut goal, but he was denied by the cross bar, again from another Waller delivery.

At half time it was highlighted that the tempo and shape considering this was the first time the squad had got together was high and organised, which led to Buckinghamshire not really getting a foothold in the game. However this level needed to be maintained as players of this quality would be able to get back into the game.

The second half started with Buckinghamshire being on top and taking the game to Sussex. Jimmy Punter (Worthing College) made an exceptional save to deny the Buckinghamshire number 11 early on. Then came the goal that got them back into the game. A well worked move saw the Buckinghamshire number 10 free himself from Ross Edwards and strike the ball home from 20 yards out. 2-1.

Lesser teams may have crumbled and let their opponents back into the game. Not Sussex. Dave Beaney (Worthing College) replaced the ill feeling Barralles at centre back and Sussex gave themselves a great chance to return the lead back to two. A Hugo Cowan (Collyers) pass found the energetic Rodrigues, who was taken down by the Buckinghamshire keeper. Penalty given. Up steps Pope, who deservedly got his hat trick for his tireless and intelligent display. 3-1.

Pope was then replaced by Max Bickell (City College Brighton) to a rousing ovation from the parents and supporters in attendance for his work and performance. The changes in personnel didn't alter the shape of the side or work rate and effort. The lead could have been extended but both Bickell & Waller were denied by the Buckinghamshire keeper with solid 1 on 1 saves. The Sussex lads were really enjoying moving the ball around with Austen Symons (Varndean) being the catalyst for winning possession back and dictating play.

Unfortunately Shooman picked up an injury, being replaced by Nick Richardson (Bexhill College) and Cowan being replaced by Jacob Merrick (St Bedes). The changes gave Sussex another gear with Merrick and Richardson getting involved in play and looking to create. Sussex deservedly scored a fourth and decisive goal with Merrick feeding Edwards, who struck an unstoppable shot from 30-yards into the roof of the net to cap a superb display. 4-1.

Jimmy Punter made way for Josh Green (BHASVIC) for the final 15 minutes again securing the defence through his communication and presence. As the final whistle blew all of the Sussex players knew that they had now set the standard for the season ahead and have staked a claim for a start in the ESFA National Cup game away to Hertfordshire in November.

Man of the Match could have gone to the whole squad for their approach and application during this game, however Ben Pope secures it with his all action, ruthless and intelligent display. Resulting in a well deserved hat trick. Well done to all involved, but this is only the start and the hard work begins now.

Sussex Schools: *Punter (Green 75); Shooman (Richardson 70), Smith (c), Barralles (Beaney 52), Hawker; Symons, Cowan (Merrick 67), Edwards; Rodrigues, Pope (Bickell 63), Waller*