

Match Report – Sunday 8th May

Boys Under 16 Mercian League

Semi Final: Woking 3 Canterbury 1

Final: Woking 5 Wycombe 2

In one of the most exciting days of the Woking Colts season, spectators witnessed both the U14 boys and U16 boys lift the much coveted Mercian Home Counties Cups. And in each case, resulting from each team beating opposition from higher leagues. But this report focuses on the achievements of the U16 boys, who had arrived following equally close fought contests with Oxted and Oxford Hawks in the quarter and semi finals.

The squad of 14 arrived at Southgate to face Canterbury, runners up in the Mercian Premier league and victors over Woking at the start of the season, where we witnessed a 14-1 drubbing in rainy conditions. Naturally, the boys weren't to forget this when learning that Canterbury were to be the opposition. Yet it was probably the memories that inspired many of the team to attend one or both pre-match practices which took place over the last couple of weeks. Woking's approach to the match was one of controlled confidence, knowing that the team had evolved significantly since the last encounter. And to a greater extent, this confidence paid off. During the first five minutes of the twenty five minute halves, Woking were able to show good build up to open play and ably demonstrate to Canterbury that a good match was expected. Yet, it was a break to Woking's half and a dubious penalty flick that led to Canterbury taking an early and somewhat unjustified lead. The remainder of the half showed Woking increasing in its ability to take hold of the game. But with no further goals, the squad approached the half time talk knowing that the second half had to be won by more than one goal. The second half saw a new dimension to the game with yellow cards being awarded for a number of incidents, with the team reduced to ten and then nine men as the half progressed. That dimension was however one that saw Woking raise their game, with three unanswered goals scored, one whilst with ten men, the second when the team was at their smallest, with two men sin-binned. The result was clear to see as Canterbury became more and more frustrated, with Woking heaping even more pressure as the squad returned to full strength. Rolling subs meant that the entire front four players could rotate effectively with additional changes to the halves and backs. This rotation became more prevalent as the management team realised that the victory was inevitable, and energies should be conserved. With the final whistle going, the reality dawned on the magnificent 14 that the ghosts of Canterbury past had been laid to rest. That quiet confidence had paid off with each and every squad member showing great team spirit, individual skills and a commitment to support each other as the numbers on the pitch continued to go up and down as the yellows were flashed. We had climbed a hill, reached the top and skipped down the other side. Hurdles had been cast aside and the result was a place in the final.

With a 1.5hr break, the boys took on refreshments, eyed up the opposition, namely Wycombe, and compared rolls of honour printed in the match day programme. We were not quite able to match the inclusion of an England striker, but what we may have lacked in that department, Wycombe were to soon find out that Woking were about to play an even higher standard of hockey, where national players would be humbled. With the same starting formation as the first game, the match was evenly paced with both teams demonstrating high class hockey. Yet, in what was later acknowledged by experienced parents, AND Chris Burton-Brown, as the finest goal ever scored, Chris Way put Woking

in front, executing a goal on the reverse stick, whilst off balance, having passed several Wycombe players, and then choosing to place the ball top right hand corner, at a pace that for many was not visible to the human eye. Notwithstanding that, we must remember that for Chris to have achieved this, the entire team had once more knitted together with exceptional passing, strong tackling, and in both games a level of communication where each and every player knew his role and importantly, could step in to support others as play required. With further goals, all to an extremely high standard throughout the first half, Woking went into half time at 4-0 up.

The half time team talk from Vin Sing emphasized how it was likely that Wycombe would not roll over. This was soon put into action as the first phase of the second half saw Wycombe get back two goals, one of which was a p-flick. We also put ourselves under pressure with more yellow cards. But upon reflection, without exception, each of the cards awarded against the team, and there were several, were down either to technical infringements (high sticks receiving aerials) or stronger than normal tackles - none of which were classed or seen as malicious. Perhaps made even more interesting by the recipients to whom some were on the receiving end of their first ever yellows! However, with a final goal in the last five minutes putting Woking 5-2 in front, Wycombe were well and truly beaten. Winners of the Mercian premier league, unbeaten all season, Wycombe had been beaten by a team from a division below. Incredible.

Whilst Chris's goal has been highlighted, a worthy mention to Harry, Will Calnan, and Joe Lewin who each scored during both matches. In total - Way 3, Samuels 2, Calnan 2, Lewin 1.

Words can't really describe the class, intensity and commitment shown by the entire Woking squad. Each member played a key role. The entire 14 squad saw a lot of action, with fitness levels unquestionable and no Woking player cramping up. (Others were seen to do so within matches during the day - u14, u16, and u18). This is probably down to Woking's fitness and motivational coach Fraser Hope, who inspired the entire team with his words of evangelical wisdom pre, during and post each match, and not forgetting his legendary email encouraging the boys to go for fitness sessions individually during the build up to the weekend.

The journey to the finals saw other players make important contributions - in fact the entire u16 colts squad - A team and development team, have played significant roles in ensuring Woking win their Mercian league, and go onwards into this championship competition. Two key players included Alexi Yakas and Sam Goss. Both of these players were strategically important to the team, and both only absent due to D of E commitments. But thanks to all of the players who dipped in and out of the A team. You know who you are. I simply can't remember everyone!

At the awards ceremony, Woking were duly praised by the Mercian committee, with recognition also being paid to Chris Way as man of the match.

The achievement of the U16s ranks amongst a growing number of 'firsts' for the Woking Colts club. As mentioned, in two of the three age groups at Mercian finals day, Woking were represented and final winners. It is also worth noting that Woking U18s narrowly missed out on finals day. They were beaten in a previous round - and that was a close match against the eventual finalists, and which took place only a week after their monumental National Plate Finals win - observers felt that this win was simply so massive, that emotionally the boys had contributed too much to

continue their winning streak into the Mercian finals. Next year many of the U16s will move up to the Rik Farrer dream squad and we know the boys are looking forward to rekindling the team spirit that Rik generated when he managed the U16 squad last year. Meanwhile, Vin-Sing will develop a new U16 squad with several of the existing squad entering their second year of the team. For both the U16 and U18 squads of 2011/2012, the benchmarks have been set and who knows what silverware we'll bring home during the season!

Finally some further facts:

- * Woking U16 Boys Colts are the BEST TEAM in the South East of England. This is undisputed. And further, from a national perspective, we must be one of the top five club teams in the country.

- * Victories were enhanced by the almost fully co-ordinated match kits that the boys managed to wear during finals day. This was the first occasion that, without exception, we all had matching socks! A big thank you to the Woking Colts sponsors who have kindly supported the squad with match shirts.

- * In a separate ceremony, the Woking Management team were awarded 'best turned out' coaching crew with their matching tops!

- * Fancy warm ups. Woking won the award for looking the most ill-prepared team prior to each match. Note to self - buy some cones for next year and all run from one to another and then criss cross back. It may not win you a trophy but it does look impressive...

- * Vin Sing has started a sideline business in 'keeping calm' mentoring classes, whilst on the side line. These courses are likely to be over-subscribed with Whit and Simon already making block bookings for the early summer sessions.

- * Cake of the year competition was jointly awarded to Lesley Hilton (wholemeal flap jacks, low fat division, homemade class) and Rosemary Lewin (Fairy cakes, muchos fairy dust, homemade class). Narrowly beaten into second place was master chef Adrian Pike who amazed the squad with his homemade doughnuts, so good they could have come from a crispy cream outlet... and ceremoniously devoured at the end of the awards ceremony! Thanks to you all, and thank you to the other parents who have helped manage and co-ordinate match teas.

- * Woking's carbon footprint is in no part contributed to by the parents who have given up their time ferrying the boys, car sharing, and vocalising much carbon dioxide from the side lines as they've supported the teams throughout the season.

- * To every boy who has played either A or development team games. Each game, whether won or lost, has contributed to the excitement that the club has witnessed throughout the season.

* To our 'guest' coaches including parents and first team players who have all inspired the teams. Mention must go to Robbo who led the A team into finals day and whilst absent, was still able to send guidance notes via email to the team which were used as part of the overall strategy.

* Manager of the Year - Vin Sing. VS has led the entire U16 colts team both on and off the pitch. His insightful decision making, team management, back office administration and all round commitment have all added to the outcomes we've witnessed on finals day and throughout the season in general.

* Player of the season - to be decided at awards night, but for the Mercian Finals Day, our award goes to the entire team:-

- Clemens - nothing much gets past me von goalkeeper
- Will first ever yellow card , shocked, and so were we, Chappers
- Fraser he simply gives us all hope. Perhaps a beatification?
- Ed steady Eddy mr reliable and everything starts at the back Hilton
- Mat Ming the (not so) terrible aerial who controlled our middle ground
- Matt come lately into the season, but heck did we need him Budd
- Jonny never stops running, never gets angry, is he human? Pike
- Harry match leader, team rock, individual genius Samuels (with only a green card on the day!)
- Joe silent but deadly and brings a touch of eloquence to the team Looman
- Archie tempestuous, sprightly, gobby, with moments of 'wow' lipster
- Tom bobby diamond dazzler Parke (who brought home one of TWO winners medals to the Parke household with his bro in the U14 winning team - ditto Chris and Ed Way btw)
- Chris suggest we all buy tickets for the 2016 Olympics now Way. No more can be said
- Will prolific striker, skills beyond our comprehension, and keeps us all on our toes Calnan
- Paddy we saw him there, here, by the post, by the line and back by the post again McGrath.

A day to remember. Thank you to all the supporters. Well done team Woking.