



Wimbledon Website Match Report

The Dons saw our Bristol Street Motors Trophy Southern Group C fixtures end with a loss as Wycombe Wanderers emerged as 1-0 winners.

Following a first-half that featured little action other than Josh Davison's penalty being saved, the second-half was far brighter with Wimbledon creating good openings.

However our much-changed side couldn't find the decisive touch required as we sought to get a win that would see us top the group.

A spell of good pressure in the closing stages failed to result in the goal we required, with Wycombe striking with a sucker punch through Kieran Sadlier's goal which proved decisive.

Nevertheless there was one standout positive for as 15-year-old Academy graduate Justin Clarke made his senior debut off the bench, showing once again that the future is bright for the Dons.

Johnnie Jackson made multiple changes to the side which beat Doncaster Rovers 2-0 last time out, with Nik Tzanev, Lee Brown, Davison, Josh Neufville, James Ball, Charlie Lakin, Aron Sasu and Paul Kalambayi all coming in to start.

Meanwhile there was a youthful look to our bench, with Kai Jennings, Junior Nkeng and Clarke being handed chances to impress following their exploits in the FA Youth Cup with our Under-18s.

There was also a familiar face in the opposing line-up, with former Don Lyle Taylor making his debut for the Chairboys, having signed for the club earlier this week.

Tzanev was forced into action within the first minute as he did well to repel an effort from distance which skimmed up off the wet surface. Our backline had to withstand further early pressure with Alex Pearce being at his dominant best to repel a series of aerial deliveries.

After a quiet opening half an hour Wimbledon had a golden opportunity to take the lead when referee Aji Ajibola pointed to the penalty spot for an adjudged handball. Davison was the man to step up for the Dons, however he saw his spotkick well saved by Franco Ravizzoli.

Pearce was then called into action again as he made a goal-saving challenge with the Chairboys seemingly clean through. Tzanev also made light work of a Jack Grimmer effort after the opposing defender had strode out with the ball. A quiet first-half left the game very much up for the taking moving into the second 45 minutes.

There was a chance for Ryan Johnson to build up his minutes as he replaced Pearce at the break, taking his place at the heart of the defence alongside Kalambayi.

David Wheeler came mightily close to giving the hosts the lead as he met a low cross, thankfully Tzanev was in inspired form as he managed to scoop the effort away. Up the other end Neufville was causing problems as he sped past three challenges to win a corner.

Sasu was also looking to take the game by the scruff of the neck as his mazey run resulted in Lakin seeing a shot well blocked on the edge of the area.

The build up play was good from Wimbledon but Wycombe were proving to be a tough nut to crack as we moved into the final 20 minutes. In an attempt to add something different into the mix Jennings was brought on for the closing stages.

It was the hosts who found the breakthrough however, with Kieran Sadlier flicking home from close range via the help of a slight deflection.

Shortly afterwards Nkeng was given another taste of first-team action, whilst Clarke was handed his professional debut, with the duo replacing Neufville and Davison.

Jennings came extremely close to bagging his first senior goal as he saw a deflected volley scooped over the crossbar by the wrong-footed Ravizzoli. There was almost an astonishing ending to the game as Tzanev nearly connected with a late corner after being thrown forward at the death.

However he failed to make adequate contact, meaning it was the Chairboys who took the victory and topped the group, with the Dons having also sealed their progress to the knockout stages earlier in the month.

AFC Wimbledon: Nik Tzanev, Huseyin Biler, Lee Brown, Josh Davison (Justin Clarke), Josh Neufville (Junior Nkeng), Alex Pearce (Ryan Johnson), James Ball (Kai Jennings), Omar Bugiel, Charlie Lakin, Aron Sasu, Paul Kalambayi

Attendance: 664 (159 away)

“Great to give young lads opportunities”

Johnnie Jackson focused on the positives after today’s 1-0 loss to Wycombe Wanderers as he handed yet more opportunities to a cluster of young Dons.

Academy graduates Justin Clarke, Junior Nkeng and Kai Jennings were all involved off the bench for a much-changed Wimbledon side – with the former making his professional debut at the age of 15, making him our youngest ever player to feature at senior level.

It was a positive moment for those of a yellow and blue persuasion, whilst in the game itself we also showed some bright moments in the second-half.

Here Johnnie discusses the defeat and provides his reaction to giving more young prospects a chance.

ON THE PERFORMANCE...

It was a really close game. We came here looking to win despite being through. It was a valuable game for us in terms of getting minutes into lads coming back from injury. It wasn’t the outcome we wanted or the outcome we deserved.

We had some moments, we missed the penalty and I feel like their keeper has pulled off an unbelievable save at the end – I don’t know how he kept that one out! We would have deserved a draw on the balance of play.

Our shape was a lot better in the second-half, we had looked a little disjointed in the first half an hour. We won the ball in better areas during the second and broke off our shape. There were a few moments where we counter attacked well. Ironically we conceded in the period when we were on top.

The response to the goal was good and we ended the game pushing hard for an equaliser with three young kids on the pitch.

ON JUSTIN CLARKE’S DEBUT...

It was a fantastic moment. It’s great as a coach to give young lads opportunities. Junior Nkeng and Kai Jennings have already had little tastes of it. Justin Clarke got his opportunity today – he trained with us yesterday, we had to take him out of school! The lads have been great around him and he’s one we have really high hopes for. They were all bright when they came on, it’s fantastic for the Club.

Justin graduates to the top class after mock exams!

Schoolboy striker on stepping up to first team level

Teenage striker Justin Clarke made the grade to become our youngest ever first team debutant - and at a time when he's preparing for another big test in the classroom.

The 15-year-old earned top marks from Johnnie Jackson in training, to be awarded his big opportunity in the closing stages of the Trophy game against League One Wycombe Wanderers at Adams Park.

"I missed school on Friday to train with the first team for the day," said Justin. "I've just had my mocks as well. School and exams are important too.

"The players welcomed me in and they involved me in everything they do. It was a good feeling to get my debut, even though it wasn't the result we wanted.

"I've got to work harder than before now because you always want to progress. I'm proud of the achievement, but I want to do more. Next time I want to try to get a goal and make an impact for the first team."

While Justin initially came to our academy after moving on from Chelsea's development programme, Junior Nkeng - who also brought youthful exuberance to our attack as a late substitute - has found a new home with us since leaving Spurs.

"From Under-10s to Under-15s I was at Tottenham," said Junior. "I got released and then went on trial with Wimbledon for the Under-16s in pre-season. I signed in September.

"It's a very good feeling to represent the Club at first team level. Last time in this competition I came on for a minute or so against Crystal Palace to make my debut, but this time I got much longer and I was so happy to be on the pitch.

"I had a bit of a rocky start with the academy, but I've been getting goals and now I want to score in the FA Youth Cup. That's my next goal! We're trying to get more of us in with the first team - training and making debuts. We also want to stay top of the league."

Our Under-18s dropped to third in the Youth Alliance South East yesterday, after defeat at new leaders Luton Town. Stevenage, Thursday night's visitors to Plough Lane for the second round tie in the Youth Cup, occupy second.

However, the young Dons duo and their skipper Kai Jennings - who made his third first-team appearance at Wycombe - are set to return to the academy squad for the game under the lights at the Cherry Red Records Stadium (kick-off 7pm).

"This is what we've got to focus on now," said Kai. "We could face Blackburn Rovers at home in the next round, but we've got to beat Stevenage first. Everyone is going to work hard in preparation and do all we can on Thursday.

"When we play with our age group, we need to make sure that we're dominating, keep pushing ourselves, and each other. Hopefully, more of us can make the breakthrough, because we've shown there is a tight bond between the Under-18s and the first-team.

"The manager and Rob Tuvey advised me to keep working hard and to try to dominate at my age group. Chances like this will come around if we do that and put us in a good place to be selected."