

2009-10

Pre-season started with matches at home against league opposition. Norwich City were the first visitors, as part of the contractual agreement with regards to Cody McDonald's transfer in the January of 2009. A strong side was brought down by Bryan Gunn, Norwich City manager, and this showed in the end result of the match with the Darts being defeated 7-2 by their League One opponents. Following this match, defeats came against a Gillingham XI and a Millwall side. In between these matches were victories against Metropolitan Police, Witham Town and Welling United. The Welling match had been put back 48 hours following an area-wide power cut due to theft of cables from a local sub-station.

Following the Millwall friendly, three further matches were scheduled at Cambridge City (a defeat), VCD Athletic (a victory) and a home match against Folkestone Invicta when the club opened the gates for free admission.

The Darts' league season began against Horsham in front of a partisan Princes Park crowd, and they were not sent home disappointed as the men in black and white won 3-2, with two goals from new midfield signing Elliot Bradbrook. Darts then went on a run of four consecutive league victories, winning away at Margate and Hastings United, followed up with a 5-0 trouncing of Kingstonian in front of their coach, Sky pundit Martin Tyler. New signing Lee Burns bagged a hat-trick against Kingstonian to follow up his debut goal against Margate and a brace against Hastings United. Following his debut goal, Burns would go on to score in eight consecutive matches. The good form of the side continued, and, in fact, would have been 12 straight wins but for a 1-1 home draw with Wealdstone. In the FA Cup, the Darts defeated Chipstead 6-1 away from home, followed by a hard earned 2-1 win at Worthing to earn a home tie with Blue Square South side Chelmsford City. This would become the Darts first defeat of the season as they succumbed 1-4.

However, following the FA Cup defeat, the Darts went on to secure another five straight league and cup wins, defeating Sittingbourne and, by a quirk of fate, Chipstead again in the FA Trophy before sealing a tie away at last season's Ryman Premier Champions, Dover Athletic. The club's ambitions of Wembley fell away down at the Kent coast with a 3-2 defeat by former Dart Andy Hessenthaler's side.

The league season continued to go from strength to strength though, as the side remained undefeated until the 28th November when AFC Hornchurch came to Princes Park and sent the Darts packing with a narrow 1-0 defeat. This would be the first time that the Darts had not scored all season, a total of 22 games. Never-the-less, the club bounced back with a hard-earned victory against Waltham Abbey. The Darts' chances of Ryman League Cup success ended on a bitterly cold evening at Princes Park in the middle of December, with a 5-4 defeat against Aveley. The Darts were in the box-seat with only a few minutes to go but two late goals managed to save the paying customers from extra-time and, potentially, frost-bite.

Christmas came and went, and the traditional Boxing Day fixture was held against Cray Wanderers at Princes Park, where a point was all the Darts could manage. Two away games followed, separating 2009 and 2010, in which Darts

took all six points, firstly with a 5-2 defeat of Canvey Island, and then the return fixture against Cray Wanderers (2-1).

After the match at Hayes Lane, there was a three week delay owing to a huge amount of snowfall, but when the Darts returned, they had their worst run of the season. A draw against Carshalton Athletic was followed up by a defeat in the Kent Senior Cup against Welling United, both of these matches at Princes Park. The Darts were due to face Harrow Borough on the Saturday following the Welling United defeat, but despite travelling to Harrow and the pitch passing a lunchtime inspection, the match was postponed at 2.15pm leaving a disappointed travelling army to make the journey home. The beginning of February wasn't good either, with two defeats without scoring away to Billericay Town on a wet and windy Tuesday night, and then a defeat against Sutton United at home.



Rob Haworth celebrates after scoring in the 5-0 win over Hendon in September

However, the tide soon turned and the Darts regained their form with a 4-1 demolition of Tonbridge Angels, which they followed up the week after with a 3-2 victory over Ashford Town (Middlesex). An away victory at Boreham Wood, one of the Darts' bogey sides, was sealed with an Elliot Bradbrook goal. Again though, Billericay Town proved to be a thorn in the Black and White army's side with a 4-1 trouncing at Princes Park. Down at Homelands, the temporary home of Maidstone United, the Darts sealed a tight one goal victory with another Lee Burns goal on a cold Tuesday night. However, the topsy-turvy nature of the season continued with a disappointing trip to Tooting and Mitcham's Imperial Fields ground. Only Allan Tait's injury time goal

was any consolation in a 3-1 defeat, which was compounded by another defeat on the Tuesday night, as the aforementioned bogey side, Boreham Wood, won 2-1 at Princes Park.

The weather had fractured the initial fixture list, and from this point on, Dartford were faced with a mixed programme, including Tuesday nights and some Thursday night football. The first of these matches was played down at Horsham in torrential rain but a double from Bradbrook helped contribute to a 3-1 victory, arresting the run of two defeats. On the Saturday, the Darts hosted Maidstone United and coasted to a 3-0 victory. Kingstonian were beginning to exert pressure on Dartford at the top of the league, and a Tuesday night defeat against Margate did not help the Dartford cause. However, the Darts were made of stronger stuff.

The run in to the end of the season would prove to be a hectic one because of the weather problems earlier in the year and any challengers for the title would need a solid run of form. Dartford began this run with a remarkable 4-3 victory against Hastings United, with Elliot Bradbrook proving again to be the difference, with a late, late winner at the "Car Park End" of Princes Park in front of the home fans. The Easter weekend was soon approaching, but the Darts' trip to Waltham Abbey on Easter Saturday was called off due to sustained rain for days beforehand.

However the Darts managed to sneak past Canvey Island on Easter Monday by 2-1. The weather had meant that the Darts would have to play seven games in fifteen days at the end of the season, with the first being a trip to Dartford's nearest and only viable rivals, Kingstonian. In fact, the K's were playing on the Wednesday prior to the match against Waltham Abbey but they failed to win, meaning that the Darts needed only two points to secure the title, although one point would realistically be enough with goal difference firmly in the Darts' favour.

The scene was set, and a warm and sunny Saturday afternoon in Kingston was the stage. Any concerns about a nervous and tentative match were thrown out of the window early when Elliot Bradbrook scored after only 6 minutes, and the travelling Darts were in raptures when Ryan Hayes made it two on the quarter-hour mark. Kingstonian pulled one back but Danny Harris restored the two goal lead before half-time. The second half continued in the same vein, with Bradbrook and Hayes adding to their first half goals, before Kingstonian scored a consolation to make it 5-2 with about 10 minutes to go. Lee Burns came on and put any nervous minds to rest with a volley to make it 6-2 and confirm that the Ryman Premier League title was coming to Princes Park with six games to spare. As the final whistle blew, Darts fans flooded on to the pitch to surround their heroes and the celebrations well and truly began. Unsurprisingly, the celebrations moved into the Kingstonian bar, followed by the return to Princes Park where the party continued late into the night.

The season wasn't over for Darts fans though, and with the side playing on a "Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday" timetable for the final two weeks, it was a fortnight of travel beckoning. First up on the Tuesday night, just as the hangovers were dying off, the Darts travelled to Harrow Borough for the rescheduled match from January. An Alan Tait goal was enough to hand the Darts a 1-0 victory before the Thursday night trip to Waltham Abbey, where the Darts dispatched the Abbey comfortably by 4-0.

The league championship was handed to the Darts in their final home league match of the season against Aveley, in front of a bumper crowd of over 2,100 where a late equaliser by Aveley meant that the party had to go on with only a draw to close the home season.

The final week saw trips to Wealdstone (1-1) and Hendon (2-1) with a Danny Harris brace, the winner coming moments before time, and the tie that everyone had been waiting for as the final away game – Bognor Regis Town. When the fixtures were released, it was certainly the most eye-catching fixture, and bookings at the nearby Butlin's holiday camp went through the roof. Dartford fans made their way down to the Sussex coast from Friday morning onwards, and had arranged to meet up at the Waverley pub near to the ground. From 10am on match day, the Darts' fans gathered and enjoyed the hospitality, specially laid on by the staff at the Waverley, until the fans marched en-masse to the stadium. The match was a largely unmemorable 2-0 victory to the Darts, but the weekend was a huge success and one that will live on in Dartford FC memory for quite some time. The Darts were returning to the second level of non-league football for the first time since the dark days of the early 1990s.

Home matches played at Princes Park					
15.8	Horsham	Home	IL	3-2	
18.8	Margate	A	IL	4-0	
22.8	Hastings United	A	IL	3-1	
25.8	Kingstonian	Home	IL	5-0	
29.8	Wealdstone	Home	IL	1-1	
31.8	AFC Hornchurch	A	IL	2-0	
5.9	Hendon	Home	IL	5-0	
12.9	Chipstead	A	FAC	6-1	
19.9	Carshalton Athletic	A	IL	4-0	
22.9	Sutton United	A	IL	3-0	
26.9	Worthing	A	FAC	2-1	
3.10	Harrow Borough	Home	IL	2-0	
10.10	Chelmsford City	Home	FAC	1-4	
13.10	Tonbridge Angels	Home	IL	2-0	
17.10	Sittingbourne	A	FAT	1-0	
24.10	Aveley	A	IL	4-1	
27.10	Ashford Town (Midd)	A	IL	4-1	
31.10	Chipstead	Home	FAT	3-0	
7.11	Bognor Regis Town	Home	IL	3-3	
10.11	Ramgate*	A	ILC	2-2	
21.11	Dover Athletic	A	FAT	2-3	
24.11	Tooting & Mitcham U	Home	IL	3-2	
28.11	AFC Hornchurch	Home	IL	0-1	
12.12	Waltham Abbey	Home	IL	2-1	
15.12	Aveley	Home	ILC	4-5	
26.12	Cray Wanderers	Home	IL	1-1	
29.12	Canvey Island	A	IL	5-2	
2.1	Cray Wanderers	A	IL	2-1	
23.1	Carshalton Athletic	Home	IL	1-1	
26.1	Welling United	Home	KSC	1-3	
2.2	Billericay Town	A	IL	0-1	
6.2	Sutton United	Home	IL	0-2	
13.2	Tonbridge Angels	A	IL	4-1	
20.2	Ashford Town (Midd)	Home	IL	3-2	
27.2	Boreham Wood	A	IL	1-0	
6.3	Billericay Town	Home	IL	1-4	
9.3	Maidstone United	A	IL	1-0	
13.3	Tooting & Mitcham U	A	IL	1-3	
16.3	Boreham Wood	Home	IL	1-2	
18.3	Horsham	A	IL	3-1	



Darts started the 2009-10 a little worryingly finding themselves 0-2 behind to Horsham at Princes Park in their first match. It all came right in the end as they came back to win 3-2. Here, Rob Haworth celebrates one of the Darts' goals. This win started a run that saw them win eleven and draw one of their first twelve league and cup matches.



We need not have worried. At the end of the season, Tony Burman was in possession of the Isthmian League Premier Division Championship Trophy. (Photos: Carol White-Griffiths/Sportshotz)

20.3	Maidstone United	Home	IL	3-0
23.3	Margate	Home	IL	0-1
27.3	Hastings United	Home	IL	4-3
5.4	Canvey Island	Home	IL	2-1
10.4	Kingstonian	A	IL	6-2
13.4	Harrow Borough	A	IL	1-0
15.4	Waltham Abbey	A	IL	4-0
17.4	Aveley	Home	IL	2-2
20.4	Wealdstone	A	IL	1-1
22.4	Hendon	A	IL	2-1
24.4	Bognor Regis Town	A	IL	2-0

* Darts won 5-4 on penalties

RYMAN LEAGUE - PREMIER DIVISION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DARTFORD	42	29	6	7	101	45	93
Sutton United	42	22	9	11	65	45	75
Aveley	42	21	7	14	83	62	70
Boreham Wood	42	20	8	14	54	44	68
Kingstonian	42	20	8	14	73	69	68
Wealdstone	42	17	14	11	65	65	65
Hastings United	42	18	9	15	68	56	63
Tonbridge Angels	42	18	8	16	69	67	62
AFC Hornchurch	42	16	13	13	51	47	61
Hendon	42	18	6	18	61	59	60
Horsham	42	16	8	18	65	67	56
Tooting & Mitch	42	15	10	17	60	64	55
Billericay Town	42	14	12	16	44	42	54
Harrow Borough	42	13	14	15	66	63	53
Cray Wanderers	42	14	9	19	54	70	51
Canvey Island	42	13	11	18	57	62	50
Carshalton Ath	42	12	13	17	58	64	49
Maidstone United	42	13	10	19	39	57	49
Margate	42	11	12	19	49	71	45
Ashford T (Mdd)	42	11	11	20	62	80	44
Waltham Abbey	42	12	8	22	49	74	44
Bognor Regis T	42	9	14	19	45	65	41

	APP	GOALS
John Beales	33 (15)	
Elliott Bradbrook	35 (1)	14
Adam Burchell	3 (6)	3
Billy Burgess	41 (1)	3
Lee Burns	40 (4)	23
Joao Carlos	1 (3)	
Jamie Coyle	32 (7)	5
Danny Crouch	3 (7)	1
Danny Dafter	25 (14)	2
Jamie Day	13 (1)	3
Karl Dent	0 (2)	
Seun Eferakorho	0 (1)	
Adam Flanagan	49	2
Adam Gross	51	2
Danny Harris	30 (6)	17
Rob Haworth	23 (18)	13
Ryan Hayes	40 (8)	10
Conor Heffernan	0 (1)	
Ryan Johnson	17	1
Tony Kessell	3	
Jay May	9 (10)	6
Lee Noble	24 (18)	5
Carl Rook	9 (5)	1
Michael Shinn	5 (2)	
Allan Tait	14 (14)	7
James White	28 (11)	3
Chris Wimshurst	0 (1)	
Andrew Young	48	