

WILL INVICTA END RECENT DULWICH JINX?

Written by Mick Cork
Thursday, 10 January 2013 14:48 -

Boasting a 100 per cent record in 2013 – and yes, okay that's only two games so far – Invicta take on league leaders Dulwich Hamlet at Cheriton Road on Saturday – the first of several tough games for Neil Cugley's side in coming weeks.

“Yes, of course it's a good test for us” said boss Cugley whose attitude – despite gloomy reports in some quarters – typifies the old Keep Calm and Carry On message that has become so popular of late.

But notwithstanding Saturday's fixture against Dulwich (who are unbeaten in their last 13 games) Folkestone then visit third placed Leatherhead next Tuesday and second-placed title favourites Maidstone United seven days later – those two midweek games either side of a trip a week on Saturday to face a Merstham side who have beaten Invicta twice already this season.

“We do have some tough games coming up – and it was important that we won the last two (Kent derbies against Whitstable and Faversham) to boost everyone's spirits around the club” said Neil this morning, Thursday.

“But if we can pick a few points up in the next month or so, our fixtures don't look as tough in March and April and we can hope to finish the season strongly.”

Folkestone last beat Dulwich on a wet Tuesday night at Champion Hill in October 2009, winning 1-0 with a goal from James Everitt on the stroke of half-time. That was one of a run of 1-0 victories that proved vital on the way to promotion.

The sides had drawn 0-0 at Cheriton Road on the opening day of the 2009/10 season.

The previous season (2008/09) had also seen a goalless draw between the sides – at Dulwich towards the end of the campaign after Folkestone had won 2-0 at home early on that season

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with goals from Jimmy Dryden and Andy Pugh.

With a couple of wins and those two goalless draws, Invicta had never lost to the famous former amateur club up to that point, but when the teams clashed again in earnest – last season (2011/12) – they met no fewer than three times – including the play-off semi-final and Dulwich won all three - 5-2 at Champion Hill, 3-1 at Cheriton Road and then 2-1 in the play-off game at Dulwich.

The pink and blue shirted Londoners were arguably as good as any team in Ryman One South last season, the only real surprise being that they failed to overcome Bognor Regis in the play-off final, again missing out on promotion to the Ryman Premier.

The Hamlet also ended Invicta's unbeaten run at the start of the 2012/13 campaign when two goals from their outstanding midfielder Erhun Oztumer deservedly won the game for the home side.

The diminutive one-time Turkish international is a massive favourite with his home supporters and has been named man of the match no fewer than eight times in just 24 appearances.

He was on target again last Saturday, when Dulwich scored three goals in the final 18 minutes of their home clash with Corinthian Casuals, winning 3-0 on that occasion.

(With a much-changed side Hamlet beat the same opponents 4-1 in a London Senior Cup game earlier this week.)

Playing-wise, newcomer Dane Luchford – who impressed on debut at Faversham - could make his home debut.

Folkestone may also have the versatile Shane Hamshare in their squad if the former Dover player = and son of Folkestone Town and Invicta legend Chris Hamshare – manages to secure

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his release from Whitstable by the weekend.

'Young Hammy' – just returned from a spell in the USA – trained with Invicta on Tuesday and boss Cugley admits that he could prove a valuable addition as he is able to play in defence or midfield and also has a goal or two in his locker, judged on his record at previous clubs including Dover, Faversham and Whitstable.

The increasingly impressive Nat Blanks was unwell earlier this week, but the manager hopes will have recovered enough to come into contention while Liam Dickson has trained twice since recovering from a knee injury suffered in the 1-0 win over Tooting & Mitcham a month ago.

"Nat should be okay – I'm hoping it's just a 24 or 48-hour bug he's had - but Dicko should definitely be back in the squad again" said manager Cugley.

On Tuesday – as mentioned – Folkestone travel to Leatherhead for the game that was washed out when first scheduled to be played on November 24.

The most memorable clash between those two sides came when Invicta triumphed on pens after a 2-2 draw, aet, in the play-off semi-final at Cheriton Road at the end of the 09/10 season.