

St James Post

BAPTISM OF FIRE

Boys show what team spirit really means with a spirited second half showing.

After the early success of the girls' team in their opening games, it was time for the senior boys to begin their season with a trip to Elephant and Castle to take on Grange. With a couple of absentees, a reduced squad of seven made the journey, including several official debutants pulling on the St James' shirt for the first time.

Coach Brenta laid out the game plan and the boys looked ready. As soon as the whistle blew, the match burst into life. Within 30 seconds **Ezra** was already called into action, producing a superb save to deny the Grange attack. Unfortunately, this set the tone for much of the first half. Having already played two fixtures this season, Grange's experience showed. They pressed high, giving St James' no time to play out from the back - something the boys have been working hard on in training. With limited forward options, St James' were often forced into risky passes which Grange pounced on to create further chances.

Within five minutes St James' were 2-0 down and visibly shocked. They needed someone to settle things, and that is exactly what **Arry** provided. Channelling his frustration into determination, he drove the team forward and encouraged a renewed focus. St James' began carving out chances of their own and could easily have levelled the match if not for two fantastic saves from the Grange goalkeeper to deny **Ethan** and **Eden**, both of whom were growing into the game.

Grange continued to threaten, and a mistake at the back handed them a third. Coach Brenta responded by introducing **Gabriel** - fresh from a brilliant athletics performance earlier in the week - in place of **Fred**, who had been trying to thread passes through the tight space all half. The change didn't shift the momentum as hoped, and Grange struck again before the break to take a commanding 5-0 lead.



Ready for the second half: The boys gave their all to rectify the game

At half-time, the boys received a stern but constructive team talk. They were reminded that this league would challenge them every week and that they needed to compete for every ball. What followed was a transformation. The second half saw a completely different St James' team: relentless in the press, disciplined in defence, and working together with real purpose.

It started from the back. **Ezra**, after a testing first half, found his passing rhythm and began dictating play from his goal line. His distribution was so impressive that the opposition coach likened him to a young Alisson. He also produced a series of outstanding saves to prevent Grange from adding to their tally.

Bryan was another standout performer after shifting into a deeper role, sweeping up danger and giving the midfield freedom to push forward. This allowed **Arry** to move centrally where he could influence the game with his incisive passing.

Their persistence eventually paid off. A pinpoint ball from **Ezra** found **Eden**, who unselfishly squared it to **Ethan** to fire home through the goalkeeper's legs - a deserved reward for the travelling supporters and for the boys' much-improved display. There could have been more too, the Grange keeper kept out shots from **Gabriel** and an excellent freekick from **Arry** - it just wasn't the boys' day.

Speaking after the match, Coach Brenta said:

"Look, quite simply, on the night the best team won. Not to say they are better than us, but tonight they were. We could have given up at half-time but the boys didn't - they pulled each other through as a team, and it's a learning curve. They won't want to feel this way again."

Final Score: St James' 1 - 5 Grange

Man of the Match: Ezra

Next week the girls return to action against old rivals Michael Faraday, while the boys have a week off before facing Alfred Salter.