

## **EBBSFLEET UNITED 1 DARTFORD 0**

Dartford's first game of 2022 saw them on the road once again, where they faced Ebbsfleet United at the Kuflink Stadium for the North Kent Derby. But, it was Fleet's Ben Chapman who came off the bench to score and condemn Steve King's side to a fourth defeat of the season.

This much anticipated fixture in the National League South started with neither side prepared to give anything away in a tight first-half, which saw Ronnie Vint make his 200th appearance for the Darts. And it was his side who created the first shot on target when an attack ended with Ebbsfleet committing the foul within shooting distance. Unfortunately, Jack Jebb's 5th minute free-kick was comfortably collected by goalkeeper Chris Haigh.

Dartford just couldn't seem to get their movement going, as the hosts pegged them back into their own half. And, a minute after Jebb's free-kick, Rakish Bingham broke through on the right-flank, but missed the target with his low drive. A similar feat occurred for his teammate, Dominic Poleon, who had a good opportunity to open the scoring from the edge of the Dartford box. Thankfully, his 14th minute effort flew into Dan Wilks' side-netting.

Greg Cundle managed to get on the end of Craig Tanner's inviting cross, but failed to find the target with his header (36), before Bingham and Jack Paxman combined well to set up Cundle. This time, Connor Essam managed to deflect his goal-bound strike behind for a corner (40).

Despite those efforts, Dartford did actually begin to find their mojo after 20 minutes, as they began stringing a few passes together and, obtaining more possession, began venturing forward more often. One such move resulted in Jebb trying his luck in the 21st minute, but accuracy deserted the midfielder on this occasion.

With a minute of the half remaining, the Darts came alive and were unfortunate to have two penalty shouts denied. Firstly, a terrific move saw Jake Robinson break down the right-flank, before sending in a delightfully teasing ball which found Josh Clarke. He was tripped inside the box, but referee Mr Greg Rollason disagreed, before the energetic Tyrique Hyde collected the loose ball, only to be (what looked like) brought down by his man. Once again, Mr Rollason said no foul!

Then seconds before the whistle, Calvin Kalala set up Robinson with a wonderful pass, only for the latter's curling drive to fly the wrong side of Haigh's upright.

It was as you were in the opening exchanges of the second forty-five, but Tom Bonner, Connor Essam, and Ronnie Vint were certainly putting in a shift to deny the hosts from getting into a position to test Dan Wilks. The same could be said of midfielder Noor Husin, who was putting his body on the line with some marvellous interceptions, which would surely have been appreciated by the 2,566 supporters. Whilst Hyde and Jebb supported the attack, together with Jernade Meade and Josh Clarke, Husin was certainly an effective anchor, protecting the defence as he broke up Ebbsfleet's play where possible.

By the 57th minute, manager Steve King, brought on reinforcements, as Jake Robinson and Calvin Kalala left the field to be replaced by Ade Azeez and Dan Roberts. And, the latter could have opened the scoring eight minutes later when Meade released him with a great ball. Unfortunately, Roberts could only watch in frustration as his effort sailed over Haigh's crossbar.

Tyrique Hyde had a good opportunity with 76 minutes on the clock, only to fire just wide of the post. Seconds later, a good move by the hosts saw Tobi Adebayo-Rowling send in a dangerous ball, which was comfortably collected by Wilks. The goalkeeper then struck a beautiful ball over-the-top, which Roberts headed straight into the path of Azeez who was in a one-on-one situation...but...only to be flagged offside!

The game had become more open at this stage, as both sides looked for the winner. Unfortunately, it was the hosts who found it with just six minutes remaining, after breaking into the Dartford box from the right. Ben Chapman, who had come on for Sido Jombati early in the second-half, received the ball and managed to send it beyond Wilks and into the back of the net.

Steve King responded by throwing on Luke Wanadio for Ronnie Vint, and it almost paid off immediately when the winger collected the ball on the right-flank. He sprinted forwards, drove into the box, before delivering a delightful ball towards Connor Essam. Unfortunately, Essam's header went over the wrong side of Haigh's crossbar and the hosts claimed the three points.

The result sees the Darts drop to fifth in the table, but they're only five points away from top spot and have a game in hand. The result wasn't a fair reflection of the way the game played out unfortunately because, with a little more accuracy in front of goal, things could have been completely different. One thing's for certain though, Tom Bonner and Co won't be happy and will be determined to get back to winning ways next time out.

## **TEAMS**

**EBBSFLEET UNITED:** Chris Haigh, Sefa Kahraman, Sido Jombati, Chris Solly, Tobi Adebayo-Rowling, Greg Cundle, Christian N'Guessan, Jack Paxman, Craig Tanner, Rakish Bingham, Dominic Poleon.

**SUBSTITUTES:** Harrison Firth (GK), Adam Mekki, Alfie Egan, Elliott Romain, Ben Chapman.

**DARTFORD:** Dan Wilks, Josh Clarke, Jernade Meade, Connor Essam, Ronnie Vint, Tom Bonner ©, Jack Jebb, Noor Husin, Jake Robinson, Calvin Kalala, Tyrique Hyde.

**SUBSTITUTES:** Kieran Murtagh, Ade Azeez, George Porter, Dan Roberts, Luke Wanadio.

**By Chris Palmer**