

TONBRIDGE ANGELS 2 DARTFORD 3

A marvellous brace from Danny Leonard and another Jack Jebb special buried Tonbridge Angels, as Dartford returned to winning ways in a spirited performance at The Halycon Wealth Longmead Stadium on a beautiful January afternoon.

With the recent announcement of Luke Wanadio joining Folkestone Invicta on loan for a month, together with long-serving defender Ronnie Vint saying goodbye and signing for Dulwich Hamlet, it was only fair that Steve King announce an incoming transfer. And, so it came to be with the announcement that talented defender Korey Roberts had signed for the Darts.

The 24-year old has arrived from National League side Bromley, and will remain on loan for the remainder of the season. With Connor Essam picking up a knock in the game against Concord Rangers, Roberts' signing arrived in perfect timing, and he joined his new teammates in the starting eleven this afternoon.

A rather subdued opening few minutes then turned into Dartford dominance, as they hit the Angels with two goals in seven minutes or, rather, Danny Leonard hit them with two goals! And both contained an element of beauty...

The first arrived in the thirteenth minute when the Darts collected the ball on the left-side, deep in their own half. Kieran Murtagh turned and sent a delightful ball across to Danny Leonard, who was situated over on the right-flank. He collected the ball well, before racing into the box and firing into the bottom corner.

Seven minutes later saw the Dartford number 7 double his side's lead with another goal straight from the football school of excellence. Goalkeeper, Dan Wilks, had the ball before launching a wonderful kick over-the-top towards Ade Azeez. He split open the Angels' defence with a terrific pass, which set-up Leonard perfectly. Goalkeeper Jon Henly rushed out, but Leonard cleverly dismissed him and slotted the ball home.

The hosts were shell-shocked and failed to test Dan Wilks during the first-half. In fact, with the exception of some top distribution, the Dartford number one didn't really have much to do until the 37th minute, when he confidently collected a Tonbridge corner.

However, as so often is the case in football, the second-half was a different ball game. Angels manager Steve McKimm was clearly unhappy, and made two changes before the ball had been kicked. Adam Lovatt and Harry Hudson remained off the pitch and were replaced by James Taylor and Aaron Smith-Joseph respectively.

Four minutes into the half saw Dan Wilks having to come out to claim a dangerous cross, as Smith-Joseph sent a warning message to Tom Bonner and Co. Unfortunately, a fired-up Tonbridge managed to pull themselves back into the game, as Tommy Wood scored to halve the deficit in the 53rd minute.

It's fair to say that the hosts seemed to have the Darts on the ropes during this stage of the game, but they failed to make their creativity count where it mattered. And, despite them giving it a good go, it was Jon Henly who'd prove to be the next goalkeeper to make a save. And what a save it was too!

The save in question came on the hour, when the visitors looked to have weathered the Tonbridge storm and ventured forward with promise. The ball found Ade Azeez, and he let fly with a ferocious drive, which forced Henly to make a marvellous diving save to his left.

The goalkeeper was called into action once again in the 69th minute, after Jack Jebb's shot was saved, before Dan Wilks was then forced into action at the other end to thwart Angels' top scorer Joe Turner (79).

A minute later saw ex-Dart Craig Braham-Barrett clatter into a rampant Danny Leonard, leaving the Dartford player down with a head injury. The Tonbridge defender was booked by referee Mr Paul Johnson and a free-kick awarded. Poor Leonard had to leave the field and was replaced by D'Sean Theobalds, while Jack Jebb lined up the free-kick... Three minutes later saw play resume and Jebb did what he does best... send a wonderful strike into the top corner!

With their two-goal cushion restored, Steve King introduced Calvin Kalala for Tyrique Hyde (84), before Ade Azeez limped off the field after being fouled. His replacement was Jake Robinson, who entered proceedings as we reached the 90th minute.

Ibrahim Olutade (on for Adam Coombes around 70 minutes) pulled a goal back in stoppage time, as the hosts threw caution to the wind in a spirited attempt at salvaging a point. But, captain Tom Bonner's excellent headed clearance off the line a couple of minutes later ensured that the travelling Darts returned home with the victory.

The result sees Dartford remain in fifth place in the National League South, as they laid to rest that six-game winless run (in the league). They entertain Ebbsfleet on Tuesday evening, where another victory could see them leapfrog their local rivals.

TEAMS

TONBRIDGE ANGELS: Jon Henly, Luke Jenkins, Craig Braham-Barrett, Tom Beere, Tom Parkinson ©, Harry Hudson, Jamie Fielding, Adam Lovatt, Tommy Wood, Adam Coombes, Joe Turner.

SUBSTITUTES: James Taylor, Jerry O'Sullivan, Ibrahim Olutade, Aaron Smith-Joseph, Doug Loft.

DARTFORD: Dan Wilks, Jordan Wynter, Kai Woollard-Innocent, Tyrique Hyde, Korey Roberts, Tom Bonner ©, Danny Leonard, Kieran Murtagh, George Porter, Jack Jebb, Ade Azeez.

SUBSTITUTES: Jake Robinson, Josh Clarke, Calvin Kalala, Luke Allen, D'Sean Theobalds.

By Chris Palmer