

DARTFORD 1 HAVANT & WATERLOOVILLE 1

Dartford's title hopes were dented ever so slightly after they were held at Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park on a frustrating Saturday afternoon in front of 1,157 supporters.

To say that the visitors, Havant and Waterlooville, were physical would be an understatement. But, what was more concerning was the fact that the referee, Mr Callum Walchester, was far too lenient towards the physicality and obvious fouls inflicted upon the Dartford players. Forward, Alex Wall, grabbed the attention of many with his foul play, yet not the attention of the man in the middle or his assistants it would appear.

Having said that, however, this was a game of few clear-cut goal scoring opportunities, of which a draw was probably a fair result in the grand scheme of things.

The Darts started brightly and could have edged in front as early as the third minute. After Ade Azeez and George Porter combined well to earn an early corner, Jack Jebb's superb delivery caused mayhem in the Havant box. The ball appeared to bounce off of Connor Essam and fall into the path of Azeez at the far post. Azeez looked odds-on to net his second goal in three games, yet somehow goalkeeper Ross Worner managed to keep it out!

After fifteen minutes, Stefan Payne thought he'd opened the scoring for the visitors, but he was flagged offside after tapping the ball home from a high ball into the penalty area.

As the Dartford players battled on the pitch, the fouls kept on coming from the visitors and it wasn't long before Connor Essam (22) and George Porter (24 and 26) needed treatment. That latter foul on Porter saw the hosts awarded a free-kick, which Jebb delivered into the box a minute later. The ball alluded everyone until reaching Kory Roberts at the far post. The defender, who would later be given the Man of The Match award for his performance, headed the ball back across the goal and into the back of the net!

Unfortunately, after taking one foul too many, George Porter had to leave the pitch after 31 minutes, to be replaced by debutant Kristian Campbell. The 27-year old defender has signed for the club until the end of the season, having recently left Welling United.

Two minutes later saw the hosts defence caught out by a dangerous cross from Joe Newton on the Havant left side, which found Alex Wall to slide in and tap the ball into the net to level the score.

The hosts responded well and almost re-took the lead in the 37th minute. Azeez received the ball, chested it down well and fed it towards Campbell. The debutant drove through a couple of Hawks, before passing to Marcus Dinanga. The striker took the shot on, but his effort was blocked by the Havant defence.

Four minutes later saw the Darts presented with another opportunity, this time from the penalty spot. As Azeez raced onto the ball inside the penalty area, Ross Worner rushed out and brought the Dartford striker down. Mr Walchester pointed to the spot, and Azeez stepped up to take it.

Unfortunately, lady luck deserted the striker and Worner made the save to keep the score level at the break.

The beginning of the second-half saw the visitors make their first change in personnel, as Paul Rooney replaced Stefan Payne. Their two remaining substitutions occurred on 65 minutes (Immanuelsson Duku off for James Roberts) and 86 minutes (Jake Andrews for Billy Clifford).

Manager Steve King also made all three changes, and his remaining two saw Jordan Greenidge replace Ade Azeez (76) and Jake Robinson come on for Ody Alfa (85).

Returning to the action, which saw few opportunities in this half, as a majority of the play took place predominantly in the middle of the park. Yet, Dan Wilks was called into action after 66 minutes to prevent Tommy Wright from scoring with an excellent save. Then nine minutes later saw Ody Alfa's hard work awarded with a corner kick. Jack Jebb's set-piece was met by the head of Connor Essam, but he couldn't quite hit the target.

There would be two further opportunities for Steve King's side during the latter stages. The first came from another Jebb corner, which saw a Hawk determined to get Essam's shirt off him, but Mr Walchester wasn't interested (84)! The second arrived two minutes from full-time, Greenidge and Dinanga combined well after a terrific ball from Jebb. The duo found Jake Robinson, but the substitute couldn't keep his flicked effort below Worner's crossbar.

Considering other results in the National League South this afternoon, a point keeps the Darts in the hunt for top spot and automatic promotion. The result also preserves the impressive unbeaten record at Fortress Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park.

TEAMS

DARTFORD: Dan Wilks, Kory Roberts, Jayden Sweeney, Jack Jebb, Connor Essam, Tom Bonner ©, Ody Alfa, Tyrique Hyde, George Porter, Ade Azeez, Marcus Dinanga.

SUBSTITUTES: Jake Robinson, Che Krabbendam, Kalvin Kalala, Jordan Greenidge, Kristian Campbell.

HAVANT & WATERLOOVILLE: Ross Worner, Joe Oastler, Ben Shroll, Jake McCarthy, Alex Wall, Billy Clifford, Benny Read, Joe Newton, Tommy Wright, Immanuelsson Duku, Stefan Payne.

SUBSTITUTES: Paul Rooney, Guy Hollis, Scott Rendell, James Roberts, Jake Andrews.

By Chris Palmer