

OXFORD CITY 1 DARTFORD 1

Dartford were held to a draw at the Velocity Stadium, after a Marcus Dinanga spot-kick had given them an early lead in front of 604 supporters.

The visitors exploded out of the blocks and were awarded an early penalty, after Jake Robinson was fouled inside the Oxford City box. Marcus Dinanga stepped up to send his penalty into the top-right of Ben Dudzinski's goal and give Steve King's side the lead (3).

However, from then on, the hosts appeared to gain control of the ball more often, as they set about pulling themselves level. And, their first real opportunity arrived in the nineteenth minute when Joe Iacofano slipped through the Dartford defence. With the lively striker through on goal, goalkeeper Reice Charles-Cook, who was deputising for the injured Dan Wilks, rushed out to prevent the Oxford player from getting a shot off.

The 27-year old Grenada International was having a solid debut, but there was nothing he could do to prevent Iacofano from levelling the score in the 23rd minute. The goal came after Zac McEachran and Josh Ashby combined well, with the latter feeding the ball towards the goalscorer.

With games coming thick and fast, it's little wonder that the Darts are suffering from injury setbacks to their squad. And, it was the defensive positions that are looking rather threadbare at the moment, after experienced defender Connor Essam suffered a serious ankle injury during training. Unfortunately, the injury has put Connor out of action for the remainder of the season, so Steve King had to shuffle his side once again.

Yet, despite Oxford City having a nice percentage of the possession during the first-half, Tom Bonner and Co stood firm. In fact, the next two goalscoring opportunities went the visitors' way. Unfortunately, neither Jack Jebb (33) nor Danny Leonard (37) were able to test Dudzinski's abilities.

The Oxford goalkeeper did make a fabulous save from a wonderful Jake Robinson effort six minutes before half-time, but it needn't have mattered because the Dartford striker was deemed to have been in an offside position. At the other end, meanwhile, Charles-Cook made a routine save from an Ashby half-volley (45) to keep things level at the break.

Proceedings appeared to be more even during the opening exchanges of the second forty-five, but Charles-Cook was the first goalkeeper to be called into action after 52 minutes. Zac McEachran made a powerful run through the middle, before setting up Iacofano once again. However, Charles-Cook was alert to the danger and rushed out to smother the ball.

The Darts were the first to make changes in personnel, as both Ody Alfa and Kalvin Kalala replaced Jake Robinson and Danny Leonard after 57 minutes. Steve King's final substitution would take place after 82 minutes, when Ade Azeez came on for Samir Carruthers.

The host's substitutions took place on 63 minutes (Hamzad Kargbo on for Jacob Bancroft), 82 minutes (Lewis Coyle on for Zac McEachran), and 89 minutes (Elliott Benyon on for Joe Iacofano).

Returning to the action, both Ody Alfa and Calvin Kalala almost made immediate impacts when they came close in quick succession. The former's 59th minute drive was deflected wide of Dudzinski's upright, whilst Kalala's solo effort a minute later was saved comfortably by the goalkeeper.

At the other end, McEachran saw a low drive sail just wide of Charles-Cook's upright (73), before Kargbo forced the goalkeeper into a save a minute later.

Before his substitution, Iacofano was at the centre of attention once again in the 78th minute when he went down inside the Dartford box. The referee, Mr Ross Martin wasn't fooled though, and booked the striker for simulation. The hosts did come close again with nine minutes remaining, but George Harmon fired into the side-netting instead.

Dartford travelled back to Kent having been good value for a solid point, in a game where neither defence were prepared to give anything away.

With the recent news that long-term supporter, Sharon Thomas, had passed away after a short illness in hospital, the travelling Dartford supporters would surely have raised a glass in honour of her this afternoon. Football brings us all together, especially during difficult times, and we are sure that Sharon would be proud of her beloved Darts as always.

TEAMS

OXFORD CITY: Ben Dudzinski, Zico Asare, George Harmon, Josh Ashby, Charlie Rowan, Reece Fleet ©, Zac McEachran, Nana Owusu, Jacob Bancroft, Joe Iacofano, Harry Kyprianou.

SUBSTITUTES: Dan Matsuzaka, Lewis Coyle, Elliott Benyon, Hamzad Kargbo, Cole Dasilva.

DARTFORD: Reice Charles-Cook, Kory Roberts, Danny Leonard, Olumide Durojaiye, Kristian Campbell, Tom Bonner ©, Samir Carruthers, Kieran Murtagh, Jake Robinson, Marcus Dinanga, Jack Jebb.

SUBSTITUTES: Ody Alfa, Che Krabbenden, Calvin Kalala, Ade Azeez, Jordan Greenidge.

By Chris Palmer