

DARTFORD 1 HEMEL HEMPSTEAD 1

Marcus Dinanga stepped up at the death to net his seventh goal in eight starts, as he rescued a precious point for Dartford against Hemel Hempstead at Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park.

To say that the visitors frustrated the Darts is an understatement, as time-wasting was a big part of Mark Jones' tactics from the first whistle. However, Tom Bonner and Co were resilient throughout and were eventually rewarded for their efforts.

The first-half wasn't the best advert for National League South football, as both sides cancelled each other out in the midfield areas. Yet, it was the Tudors who created the first effort on goal when Chris Paul won the ball in the Dartford half. He fed the ball towards Sam Mantom, who sent a strike from distance high and wide of Dan Wilks' crossbar in the 20th minute.

Mantom was involved again two minutes later, as he drove towards the Dartford defence before slipping Pierre Fonkeu through. Thankfully, the latter couldn't test Wilks in any way, firing wide instead.

Midfielder, Tyrique Hyde, was given a yellow card by referee Mr Tom Danaher after 25 minutes for a late challenge on Chris Paul just outside the Dartford box. Dan Wishart found Cole Kpekawa with a neat free-kick, but the latter's header smacked back off Wilks' crossbar!

The hosts responded with a good opportunity shortly afterwards, as they attacked with speed. The play opened up for Ody Alfa, but he couldn't beat Craig King with his effort (26). A foul just outside the Hemel box earned Mantom a yellow card, but Jack Jebb couldn't keep his free-kick down on this occasion (30).

Eight minutes later saw the visitors take the lead. The goal came via a corner, which found the head of the leaping Gus Scott-Morris who buried the ball into the back of the net.

Steve King's side responded, and responded well. But, Ade Azeez saw his strike ricochet off of a Hemel defender and fly wide of Craig King's upright (42). The resulting corner found Kory Roberts, who nodded the ball down into the path of Calvin Kalala. Unfortunately, Kalala's close-range effort was thwarted by King, who'd kept his side ahead at the break.

The hosts started the second-half much brighter and came close within four minutes. Cole Kpekawa received a yellow card for an illegal block, before Jack Jebb's effort from an extremely tight angle forced a desperate clearance by a Tudor defender.

Marcus Dinanga then missed a good opportunity from close range (57), before Steve King made his first change in personnel of the afternoon with Ody Alfa exiting to be replaced by George Porter.

The visitors responded with a double change a minute later, as both Dominic Morgan-Griffiths and Charlee Hughes were replaced by Jacob Gardiner-Smith and Craig Fasanmade respectively.

The Darts continued to press forwards and Porter forced King into a routine save (61), before Kory Roberts cleared a goal-bound effort off the line at the other end (63). Despite that effort, however, the visitors weren't offering too much in attack. Instead, they were determined to frustrate the Darts by breaking up the flow of the game with obvious time-wasting tactics. Josh Castiglione was next to be booked by Mr Danaher, as he took far too long to take a simple throw-in...(64)!

Kristian Campbell then saw yellow for a late challenge (72), before Steve King made his final two substitutions with Jake Robinson and Luke Allen coming on for Olumide Durojaiye and Tyrique Hyde with fourteen minutes remaining. Hemel responded with their final change on 78 minutes, as Alfie Cerulli replaced Pierre Fonkeu.

Luke Allen made a brilliant driving run forwards with five minutes left, before feeding the ball towards Jake Robinson. Unfortunately, the substitute wasn't able to beat King. On 87 minutes Allen was at it again, this time crossing to Porter who forced the former Dartford goalkeeper into yet another good save.

As the game entered five additional minutes, the Darts kept on coming. And, with virtually the last kick of the game, Marcus Dinanga stepped up to level the score in emphatic fashion to reward his side's resilience.

This wasn't the best of performances for Steve King's men. However, in a game where defender Kory Roberts was awarded with the Man of The Match (his third award since his arrival), the Darts' refusal to give up was rewarded. And rightly so.

The result extends Dartford's unbeaten home record to an incredible 17 games. But, more importantly, it also keeps the club in third place in the National League South table.

TEAMS

DARTFORD: Dan Wilks, Olumide Durojaiye, Kristian Campbell, Jack Jebb, Kory Roberts, Tom Bonner ©, Calvin Kalala, Tyrique Hyde, Marcus Dinanga, Ody Alfa, Ade Azeez.

SUBSTITUTES: Jake Robinson, Luke Allen, Jordan Wynter, Kieran Murtagh, George Porter.

HEMEL HEMPSTEAD: Craig King, Gus Scott-Morris, Dan Wishart, Dominic Morgan-Griffiths, Jack Westbrook, Cole Kpekawa, Chris Paul, Sam Mantom, Pierre Fonkeu, Charlee Hughes, Josh Castiglione.

SUBSTITUTES: Jacob Gardiner-Smith, Alfie Cerulli, Hamilton Bunga, Craig Fasanmade, David Saunders.

By Chris Palmer