

DARTFORD 0 MAIDSTONE UNITED 1

Dartford's excellent unbeaten run at Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park came to an end, as rivals Maidstone United took the spoils in a tight, but entertaining game.

With the stadium rocking from the sounds of 2,715 supporters in full voice, the referee (Mr Dale Wootton) blew his whistle to signify a minute's applause for the recent passing of both Sharon Thomas and Leyla Latif. I'm delighted to report that that was obediently adhered to, before the bumper Bank Holiday crowd were in full-voice once again.

The opening exchanges began in typical derby day fashion, in a frantic style, as both sides attempted to gain the initial advantage. And, it was the hosts that registered the first attempt on goal via Jake Robinson. Unfortunately, his sixth minute strike failed to trouble Maidstone goalkeeper Tom Hadler.

Maidstone's Joan Luque was next to get involved when he forced Dan Wilks into an excellent save in the 10th minute. However, four minutes later saw Luque having to leave the field due to an injury. His replacement was Christie Pattison.

Meanwhile, Mr Wootton also had a busy few minutes. First he'd book Jerome Binnom-Williams for a pointless, yet blatant obstructive foul on Calvin Kalala (13), before booking Tom Bonner for a foul three minutes later. Sadly, the latter foul would prove costly for the Darts.

Regan Booty took the free-kick, which was somehow flicked on by Michael Phillips inside the danger area, and Jack Barham was on hand to nod the ball into the back of the net (17).

The goal seemed to calm the visitors a little, as they looked more comfortable than the hosts. However, after a further ten minutes Steve King's side should have levelled the score. A delightful ball over-the-top dropped perfectly for Marcus Dinanga, who was away. One-on-one with Hadler, the striker went for the low strike rather than a chip, but the goalkeeper read the situation well to make the save.

The Darts continued with their attacking football, and came close again in the 29th minute. This time, Kalala passed a great ball towards Samir Carruthers, who drove into the Maidstone box. His strike, however, smacked back off of Hadler's upright before Carruthers couldn't quite convert the rebound.

At the other end, a Maidstone attack saw Mr Wootton award them with a penalty. Barham took it, only to see Dan Wilks make a fabulous save to keep his team in the game (34).

Jack Jebb then forced Hadler to punch the ball behind with a cross that went dangerously close to going in (42), before Michael Phillips was next to go into the referee's book before the break.

It was as you were during the opening exchanges of the second-half, as both sides battled for supremacy. Tom Bonner was called into action with some superb defending to thwart a Maidstone attack (52), before Jernade Meade went into Mr Wootton's book for a foul on Christie Pattison (54).

It was fantastic to see Meade back in action after a lengthy time on the sidelines, and like his teammates, the left-back was running himself into the ground this afternoon.

Apart from that first-half goal, Wilks was a solid presence between the Dartford sticks, and he was determined to not be beaten again. It would prove to be a performance that would earn him the Man of The Match award later. In fact, the only time he was beaten was in the 61st minute. Joe Ellul beat the goalkeeper with a marvellous strike which crashed back off the crossbar, and Barham's follow-up header did exactly the same thing!

As the visitors defended strongly, Dartford just couldn't find that final killer ball. Jake Robinson (57), Luke Allen (62), Marcus Dinanga (65), and Samir Carruthers (67) all went close but were unfortunate not to find the target.

Manager, Steve King, brought on reinforcements in the forms of Ade Azeez (on for Jake Robinson, 66), Ody Alfa (on for Calvin Kalala, 69), and Kristian Campbell (on for Samir Carruthers, 80). The changes almost paid off in stoppage time, when Campbell found Alfa with a delicious cross, only to see the latter's header go over the top of Hadler's crossbar.

Late on, Tom Bonner made a superbly timed challenge to prevent Hady Ghandour (on for Jack Barham, 72) from ending up one-on-one with Dan Wilks, before the visitors held on for the win.

Result aside, Tom Bonner and Co worked tirelessly against a team that has lost just two of its previous 22 games! With momentum and luck on their side in recent games, Maidstone were always going to be difficult to beat. However, on another day and with good fortune in the final third, this would've been a different result. The Darts will continue onwards.

TEAMS

DARTFORD: Dan Wilks, Jordan Wynter, Jernade Meade, Luke Allen, Kory Roberts, Tom Bonner ©, Calvin Kalala, Samir Carruthers, Jake Robinson, Marcus Dinanga, Jack Jebb.

SUBSTITUTES: Kristian Campbell, Ade Azeez, Kieran Murtagh, Olumide Durojaiye, Ody Alfa.

MAIDSTONE UNITED: Tom Hadler, Gavin Hoyte ©, Joe Ellul, George Fowler, Sam Corne, Jack Barham, Joan Luque, Regan Booty, Michael Phillips, Jerome Binnom-Williams, Roarie Deacon.

SUBSTITUTES: George Elokobi, Jahl Powell, Hady Ghandour, Yusuf Mersin, Christie Patisson.

By Chris Palmer