

DARTFORD 0 BRAINTREE TOWN 1

Dartford's final game of the regular season at Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park saw them fall to a narrow defeat, as Braintree Town scored a late winner in front of 1,423 supporters.

The hosts started reasonably well, but a high-pressing Braintree side were hellbent on preventing the Darts' passing game from gaining a firm foothold on proceedings. And, when a pass was intercepted, The Iron took advantage of their own swift counter-attacking tactics.

The visitors' system worked perfectly in frustrating the Darts, and they could have taken the lead as early as the sixth minute. Only the alertness of Luke Allen and his excellent block prevented Braintree from registering a shot on Reice Charles-Cook's goal.

The Darts responded with an excellent effort of their own, after an attack down the left-flank forced goalkeeper William Johnson into a superb save (7). However, the visitors seemed to be winning the midfield battle, and only some fine defensive organisation kept them from taking any of the opportunities to fall in their favour. None more so than in the 12th minute, when a cross from Stefan Ilic found Simo Mbonkwi through on goal, only for Tom Bonner's well-timed crunching intervention preventing the Braintree player from pulling the trigger.

Dartford did respond once again, only this time George Porter's powerful drive failed to test Johnson (14). Then Jack Jebb found Bonner inside the Braintree box, but the captain's effort somehow flew narrowly wide of Johnson's far post (16), before Ade Azeez's shot from outside the box also failed to test the goalkeeper (20).

The Iron kept on coming, though, but were thwarted by Olumide Durojaiye's outstanding goal line clearance (26). Meanwhile, at the other end, a Jebb free-kick narrowly missed the target (33), before an excellent attack on the right via Danny Leonard thoroughly deserved a goal. However, as he got past his man and found Jake Robinson in the box, the latter's wonderful back-heeled effort was somehow saved by Johnson (37)!

Those two Dartford players combined once again after the break, when Leonard raced down the wing and sent the ball into the box. Robinson got to it, but just couldn't keep his effort down (49).

Proceedings went a bit flat for a while after that, as neither side could get a full grip on the game. The Iron were the first to make a change, as Shae Hutchinson was replaced by Gianni Crichlow on the hour. Ryan Maxwell's further two substitutions would take place on 70 minutes (Luke Holness on for Dejon Noel-Williamson) and 84 minutes (Harry Lodovika on for Stefan Ilic). In the home dugout, manager Steve King brought on Kristian Campbell for Jernade Meade (65), Marcus Dinanga for Jake Robinson (70), and Calvin Kalala for Danny Leonard (74).

Returning to the game, Reice Charles-Cook was called into action after 65 minutes, when Crichlow got on the end of an Ilic cross. The substitute's header was brilliantly saved by the Dartford goalkeeper. Two minutes later saw the referee, Mr Steven Hughes, award the hosts with a free-kick in a dangerous position. Jack Jebb took it, but his effort didn't trouble William Johnson.

The Iron's goalkeeper was called into action once again, when he saved a good George Porter strike (71), before Luke Allen sent another effort over Johnson's crossbar (74).

With the game heading into its closing stages, Braintree captain, Matthew Johnson, somehow got beyond Kristian Campbell on the right-flank and swung a high cross into the box. The ball fell straight towards Lodovika (who'd only come on two minutes previously), and he wasted no time in heading it downwards and into the back of the net (86).

The goal left the Darts with little time to respond, and so Tom Bonner and Co fell to a second league defeat of the season at Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park. The captain was given a deserved Man of The Match award at the final whistle. However, he will be picking his players up afterwards and encouraging them to go again at the weekend.

TEAMS

DARTFORD: Reice Charles-Cook, Olumide Durojaiye, Jernade Meade, Luke Allen, Kory Roberts, Tom Bonner ©, Danny Leonard, Jake Robinson, George Porter, Jack Jebb, Ade Azeez.

SUBSTITUTES: Kristian Campbell, Samir Carruthers, Jordan Greenidge, Calvin Kalala, Marcus Dinanga.

BRAINTREE TOWN: William Johnson, Matthew Maloney, Jay Porter, Matthew Johnson ©, Kyran Clements, Luke Pennell, Shae Hutchinson, Alfred Payne, Dejon Noel-Williamson, Simo Mbonkwi, Stefan Ilic.

SUBSTITUTES: Jalen Jones, Gianni Crichlow, Luke Holness, Harry Lodovika, Marcus Johnson-Schuster.

By Chris Palmer