

DARTFORD 0 CHIPPENHAM TOWN 0

(PENALTIES: 2-3)

Dartford's hopes of promotion were ended by a stubborn Chippenham Town side in a penalty shootout, after neither side could break the deadlock during 120 minutes of football.

Bericote Powerhouse Princes Park was buzzing all evening, as 1,325 supporters were in full-voice throughout the game. And, it was the Bluebirds who created the first opportunity as early as the first minute, which earned them a corner. Jordan Young found Joe Hanks, but his header was aimed directly at the grateful arms of Reice Charles-Cook.

The Darts responded, but had to wait until the 11th minute for their first real opening. It duly arrived after Samir Carruthers and Jack Jebb combined, before the latter sent a delicious ball over-the-top for Dan Roberts to run on to. Unfortunately, Roberts hesitated slightly, and that enabled Will Henry to compose himself and make the block.

The visitors hit back immediately via good play from Mo Dabre. He set up Alefe D'Abadia, who struck from distance and, with Charles-Cook beaten, saw his effort cannon back off of the crossbar. The loose ball dropped to Hanks, who pulled the trigger, only for his own teammate, Jordan Young to inadvertently clear the ball off the Dartford goalline (12)!

After a period of relative calm, with neither side able to create any meaningful opportunities, it was the visitors who perhaps should have taken the lead as we reached the half-hour mark. And, it was the combination of Young and Hanks who were involved once again, as the former fed the latter with a good ball. Hanks fired a low effort towards goal, but Charles-Cook was alert to the danger.

The Darts responded two minutes later, as Olumide Durojaiye battled with Danny Greenslade and won a corner. Unfortunately, Jack Jebb's set-piece was cleared by the Bluebirds' defender.

The remainder of the first-half saw the Darts have a fair percentage of the possession, but they just couldn't break down the strong defensive unit. It was the same at the other end, as Tom Bonner, Kory Roberts, and Co kept things compact at the back.

The second forty-five saw things open up more on the pitch, as opportunities were created by both sides. The hosts tried first in the 52nd minute, when Dan Roberts got on the end of a good ball, but Will Henry was able to collect the striker's effort. The visitors responded via Mo Dabre, who regained possession in the midfield before losing out to Kristian Campbell! However, they won the ball back once again, and Alefe D'Abadia broke free with a good touch before firing a low drive towards the Dartford goal. Once again, though, Reice Charles-Cook was there to make the save (54).

Dartford took the ball straight down the other end, as Samir Carruthers found Marcus Dinanga with a delightful ball. Dinanga took the shot on, but Henry made a marvellous save to tip the ball over his crossbar (55). Jebb's corner was intercepted, and Chippenham then counter-attacked swiftly via Young, who found D'Abadia with a long ball over-the-top. Yet, Charles-Cook was alert to make a brilliant block to thwart the lively D'Abadia (56).

The hosts responded yet again and were awarded another corner, which was cleared off the line by a Kieran Parselle header (58), before Carruthers fired just over the crossbar from distance in the 62nd minute.

The visitors were the first to make a change in personnel, as Joe Hanks was replaced by Caine Bradbury (71), and they'd also create one of the best opportunities of the half ten minutes later. The move came after some fierce battles in the midfield, and it was D'Abadia once again who let rip with an equally fierce drive from distance. The strike cannoned back off of Charles-Cook's crossbar and fell straight to Hamilton. But, with the goal wide open, he fired wide of the far post.

Manager, Steve King, made his first substitution soon after, with Danny Leonard replacing Dan Roberts. Then, deep into stoppage time and with extra time looming, Luke Allen came on for Samir Carruthers.

The first substitution almost paid off immediately, as a good ball over-the-top released Leonard down the right-flank. He raced into the Chippenham box and pulled the trigger, only for Henry to make a good save to send the game into an additional thirty minutes.

The Darts were first to attack once again, as Jernade Meade released Calvin Kalala with another good ball. Kalala made a brilliant run into the box, but fired narrowly wide of Henry's upright (92)

Both sides gave it everything throughout extra time, but no other real opportunities were created, as neither team wanted to give anything away. The Darts did make two further changes, as Kalala was replaced with Ade Azeez (109) and Jordan Greenidge came on for Marcus Dinanga (117). But, with absolutely nothing to separate the two sides, this playoff had to be settled by the lottery of a penalty shootout.

Dartford went first via Luke Allen, but Will Henry saved his penalty before Reice Charles-Cook then saved Jordan Young's effort! Then Ade Azeez saw his effort saved by Henry, before Tom Mehew scored. Kristian Campbell scored his spot-kick, before Charles-Cook saved Danny Greenslade's effort! Jordan Greenidge then edged the hosts 2-1 ahead, before Noah Coppin levelled things up once again. Henry saved Olumide Durojaiye's effort, but Alefe D'Abadia scored the final kick to send the Bluebirds through to the next round.

And, so Dartford will remain in the National League South for another season, despite a gallant effort on the pitch. Tom Bonner and Co will take a well-deserved rest, dust themselves down, and go again next season. Meanwhile, congratulations to the Bluebirds and good luck in the remaining playoffs.

TEAMS

DARTFORD: Reice Charles-Cook, Olumide Durojaiye, Jernade Meade, Kristian Campbell, Kory Roberts, Tom Bonner ©, Calvin Kalala, Samir Carruthers, Marcus Dinanga, Jack Jebb, Dan Roberts.

SUBSTITUTES: Dan Wilks, Jordan Greenidge, Ade Azeez, Luke Allen, Danny Leonard.

CHIPPENHAM TOWN: Will Henry, Danny Greenslade, Spencer Hamilton, Kieran Parselle ©, Will Richards, Alefe D'Abadia, Mo Dabre, Jordan Young, Joe Hanks, Tom Mehew, Luke Russe.

SUBSTITUTES: Zaid Al-Husaini, Noah Coppin, Caine Bradbury, Will King, Oluwasegun Lawal.

By Chris Palmer