

BATH CITY 0 DARTFORD 2

A disciplined performance, and a second-half brace from debutant Pierre Fonkeu, ensured that Alan Dowson's managerial reign kicked-off with a victory over Bath City.

As 1,059 supporters enjoyed the hot conditions, both sets of players put in a shift in a hard-fought contest on the National League South opening day.

With very little to choose between the sides during the first forty-five, the game lacked any real goalmouth action because, barely a shot in anger was tried from the protagonists. That was until the 38th minute when Dan Hayfield forced Dan Wilks into a fine smothering save.

Despite the closeness of the first-half, it was the Romans who looked slightly more threatening to be fair. And, they came close once again with a minute of the half remaining. Cody Cooke was the danger on this occasion, and his powerful header would have found the back of the net, if it wasn't for the timely and excellent goal-line clearance from Sam Odaudu.

The Dartford Academy product was having a solid game in the midfield, but would find himself having to be shifted into the defence at the start of the second-half.

A collision within ten minutes of the game between Kristian Campbell and Cody Cooke left the Dartford defender struggling. And, by half-time, the left-back was unable to continue due to an apparent shoulder injury. Luke Allen replaced him and slotted into the midfield, with Odaudu stepping into a more defensive role. It would prove to be a position in which the talented youngster would thrive during the remaining forty-five minutes.

Alan Dowson's side looked more of a threat during the opening exchanges of the second-half, as they ventured forward with more purpose. Connor Essam couldn't quite find the target with his guided header just two minutes after the restart, which should have been a warning sign to the hosts.

Debutant, Davide Rodari, saw his well-struck effort deflected behind by a desperate Kieran Parselle challenge (51), before Zac Bell cleared the resulting corner off the line seconds later. Samir Carruthers would then send a free-kick high over Joe Wright's crossbar (61), before teammate Odaudu forced the goalkeeper into a save with a close-range strike (62).

The hosts responded via Cooke, but his effort which sailed behind for a goal-kick (65) proved to be instrumental with what happened next. Dan Wilks sent his goal-kick long, which found Pierre Fonkeu free on the right-flank. The debutant raced onto the ball, before sending it beyond Wright to give the Darts a deserved lead after 66 minutes.

Bath City responded immediately and were soon rewarded with a corner. The set-piece met the head of Alex Fletcher, who flicked the ball towards the Dartford goal. But, Wilks was alert to make an excellent save and keep his side ahead (69).

Two minutes later saw the visitors double their lead via a swift attack involving Fonkeu once again. The move ended with City's Bell desperately trying to defend, but unable to keep the lively debutant's effort out!

As the Darts took control of the game, both Tom Bonner and Davide Rodari would find themselves booked by referee, Mr Craig Scriven, for late challenges within minutes of each other. Rodari would then be substituted with seven minutes remaining, as Alex Wall entered the field in his place.

As for the hosts, they made two changes in personnel during the second-half as well. First, Scott Wilson replaced Elliott Frear (63), before Tom Smith came on for Luke Spokes (77). However, they made little difference to the final outcome. The closest City came afterwards was when Fletcher almost found Wilson with a looping ball, only for Connor Essam to intercept and clear the danger to ensure his team kept the clean sheet.

And, so Dartford returned to Kent with all three points after a strong and disciplined performance. It wasn't the prettiest of games, but it wasn't ugly either. Ultimately, though, it's points on the board, as the Alan Dowson revolution begins.

TEAMS

BATH CITY: Joe Wright, Joe Raynes, Jordan Dyer, Kieran Parselle ©, Alex Fletcher, Dan Hayfield, Cody Cooke, Elliott Frear, Chris Lines, Luke Spokes, Zac Bell.

SUBSTITUTES: Jack Batten, Tom Smith, Ryan Clarke, Scott Wilson, Tommy Backwell.

DARTFORD: Dan Wilks, Jordan Wynter, Kristian Campbell, Samir Carruthers, Connor Essam, Tom Bonner ©, Luke Coulson, Kieran Murtagh, Davide Rodari, Pierre Fonkeu, Sam Odaudu.

SUBSTITUTES: Luke Allen, Alex Wall, Maxwell Statham, Tom Wray, Dan Roberts.

By Chris Palmer