

Contrasts at The Abbey

THE self-inflicted agony the Town suffered against Grimsby was a case of restarting where they had left off at the Abbey Stadium in midweek.

It was an astonishing change of fortunes, and frightening drop in confidence.

For 70 minutes the Town looked as though they had put all their troubles behind them, and the third win of the season was all but buttoned up.

They had played their best football for a long time, based on sharp accurate passing, and were a class above the home side.

Shambolic

But with 17 minutes to go Cambridge, very quick, and now mixing a little more passing with the long ball, pulled a goal back, and all the old defensive frailties returned, and shambolic defending saw two more points go down the drain.

Cambridge had only two good spells, the first ten minutes and the last 20, with the Town weathering the first expertly and the second abysmally.

The interval lead was well merited on run of play, given them in the 21st minute by Scott Oakes, with a side-footed flick from a left wing run and cross by Marvin

CAMBRIDGE UTD 3
LUTON TOWN 3

Johnson, who had tricked his way round Gary Rowett.

Two goals in six minutes by Phil Gray early in the second half had the Town following singing in delight. The first was a 25-yarder helped in by a deflection off Mick Heathcote, the second a sweet and true low drive.

But it all went wrong after Lee Philpott pulled one back in the 73rd minute, with a shot that Andy Peterson allowed to slip underneath his body. The cross had been delivered by Devon White after he had turned Darren Salton on Cambridge's right wing.

Acting manager Gary Johnson threw on both subs to try to change things, and one of them, John Francis raced through for a gift after a midfield mistake by Chris Kamara four minutes later. The only surprise after that was that Cambridge did not go on to win as the Town's heart and confidence drained. The inevitable equaliser came from Francis, running in as the spare man after a deep cross from the left by Micky Norbury, leaving the Town hanging on for the last three minutes.

"I was delighted with the first 70

minutes," said manager David Pleat. "But we must learn lessons from the last 20."

Match details

LUTON TOWN: Petterson; Linton, Salton, Peake, Johnson; Oakes, James, Kamara, Preece; Claridge, Gray. Subs: Campbell and Greene.

CAMBRIDGE: Sheffield; Fensome, Heathcote, O'Shea, Kimble; Rowett (Francis 55 mins), Raynor, Clayton (Ainsworth 59 mins), Philpott; Norbury, White.

THE GOALS: 0-1, 21 mins — Scott Oakes sidefooted flick from a cross by Marvin Johnson. 0-2 48 mins — Phil Gray, deflected drive after taking on two men and shooting from just outside the box. 0-3, 54 mins — carbon copy by Gray, but without the deflection. 1-3, 73 mins — Lee Philpott drive under Andy Peterson from Devon White's cross. 2-3, 77 mins — substitute John Francis after Chris Kamara headed towards his own goal from the centre circle to set up Micky Norbury to put Francis clear. 3-3, 87 mins — spare man Francis, unmarked on the blind side from a left-wing cross by Norbury.

OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved and four wide; Cambridge five saved, four wide and a cross bounced onto the top of the bar. Corners: 5-4 to the Town.

REFEREE: Vic Callow, Solihull.

BOOKED: No-one.

ATTENDANCE: 5,715, including 1,144 from Luton.

ENTERTAINMENT: Lovely for the first 73 minutes. Wretched after that as a three-goal lead was thrown away.