

Rivers puts Crewe back in full flow

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By Ron Gubba

Crewe A 2 Luton T 1

CREWE Alexandra, who have failed at the semi-final stage of the Second Division play-offs in both of the past two seasons, launched a determined second-half recovery to take a narrow lead into Wednesday's second leg at Kenilworth Road.

The sending-off of Luton's Julian James in the 58th minute, for a second bookable offence, allowed Crewe to dominate the final half hour, and with better finishing they might be taking a bigger advantage to a ground where they were beaten 6-0 earlier in the season.

Luton took the lead after only three minutes. The pacy Andrew Fotiadis sprinted past Steve MacCauley and delivered a hard, low cross which goalkeeper Jason Kearton, returning after injury, could only parry, and David Oldfield followed up for his first goal for almost three months.

Tony Thorpe, Luton's leading scorer, twice went close to adding to the lead after wrong-footing MacCauley. His first effort was narrowly wide and his

second headed off the line by Ashley Westwood as Fotiadis closed in.

Crewe's prospects did not look promising at the interval, but they improved seven minutes into the second half when Shaun Smith made a left-wing run before delivering the ball to Mark Rivers, who squeezed the equaliser inside the near post.

The dismissal of James soon followed and Crewe went ahead in the 68th minute when Luton goalkeeper Ian Feuer challenged Dele Adebola on the edge of the penalty area and the ball spun loose to Colin Little, who slid his first goal of the season into an empty net.

Danny Murphy, the architect of many of Crewe's best moves, sent Adebola clear with 10 minutes left, but the club's leading scorer struck the foot of a post, a miss which could yet prove costly.

Crewe: Kearton; Unsworth, Westwood, MacCauley, Smith; Murphy, Charnock, Whalley; Little (Johnson 81), Adebola, Rivers (Tierney 73). **Sub:** Anthrobus. **Booked:** Murphy.

Luton: Feuer; James, S Davis, Patterson, Thomas; Alexander, Waddock (Marshall 8), McLaren, Oldfield; Thorpe, Fotiadis (Grant 60). **Sub:** K Davis (g). **Booked:** James, Alexander. **Sent-off:** James.

Referee: T Heilbron (Newton Aycliffe).