

Goal-den Graham sinks the Cobblers

INFORM defender Graham Alexander scored the only goal of the game against Northampton to move Luton Town up to third place in the Division Two table.

Only Stoke City and Preston North End now stand between Lennie Lawrence's men and top spot after another professional home display last night.

The Hatters fielded an unchanged team for the third successive game.

Gavin McGowan was available after suspension but was nursing an ankle injury.

Former Hatters transfer target Paul Wilkinson led the Northampton line well in the opening stages with his height posing the home defence problems and leading to a half chance that he scuffed to Kelvin Davis.

Northampton's success in reaching last season's play-offs was largely based on route-one football and, despite struggling so far this campaign, Cobblers boss Ian Atkins doesn't seem to have changed his philosophy, with his play-ers - in particular left back John Frain - aiming for the head of former Everton star Wilkinson at every opportunity.

Thankfully, Sean Evers cut down the Frain supply line early on forcing Northampton to change tactics and a game of football rather than a battle of attrition was allowed to develop.

On 16 minutes, an impudent piece of opportunism saw visitors' striker Carlo Corazzin curl an edge-of-the-area free kick into the bottom corner as Kelvin Davis organised his wall. But there had been no whistle from referee Mick Fletcher and Northampton's Canadian international drilled the retake into Davis's better-prepared wall.

Three minutes later the Hatters had a set piece of their own after a foul by James Hunt on Phil Gray.

Ray McKinnon, Steve Davis and Michael McIndoe all hovered over the ball on the corner of the penalty box. But McIndoe elected to pass square to Graham Alexander whose 25-yard

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TUESDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL

LUTON T... 1

NORTHAMPTON ... 0

DAVE FLETT reports from Kenilworth Road



● GRAHAM ALEXANDER: scored his fourth goal of the season.

Hatters move up to third place in the league table

effort was deflected past Northampton keeper Andy Woodman for his fourth goal of the season.

An angry Northampton responded, with the uncompromising Ian Sampson going straight through the back of Gray and being shown an inevitable yellow card. Moments later, the Hatters' Northern Ireland international received the same treatment from Sampson's defensive partner Dougie Hodgson who was lucky to escape with a stern ticking off from referee Fletcher.

Gray troubled the visitors' defence throughout the first half and, after 30 minutes, forced a save out of Woodman with a 25-yard low drive.

Two minutes later, Douglas was inch-

es off making contact with Evers' excellent cross from the right before a rare Steve Davis mistake gave Wilkinson a chance that he cannoned against the roof of the Kenilworth Road stand.

It was Northampton who finished the half stronger. On 40 minutes Kelvin Davis saved the Hatters when Marvin Johnson allowed a long Colin Hill free kick to drift over his head and Corazzin ghosted in to force a point-blank save.

A minute later, ex-Millwall midfielder Dave Savage rattled the Hatters' bar with a tremendous 20-yard volley.

Having survived those scares, the Hatters came out for the second half attacking and a seven-man move ended with Douglas stooping low to head

Alexander's cross wide minutes after the restart.

Soon after, Northampton were dealt a severe blow when the impressive Savage was stretchered off following an innocuous fall. He was replaced by Carl Heggs.

Heggs occupied a wide left spot to help visiting strikers Wilkinson and Carazzin but it was the home team who continued to do most of the attacking.

On 66 minutes, skipper Davis curled an immaculate ball to the far post but it somehow eluded the unmarked McKinnon and McIndoe.

McIndoe did get on the end of a deep Alexander cross shortly afterwards but Woodman beat away his far-post header.

The chance had been created by an excellent turn and backheel from Gray, growing in confidence by the game, and adding touches of class and composure to the Hatters' approach play.

At the other end, Wilkinson reminded the Hatters that their advantage was still a slender one, sending in a header that Kelvin Davis gathered at the second attempt.

Lennie Lawrence's men were unlucky not to double their lead on 79 minutes

when Douglas squeezed in a shot that Woodman had to punch behind.

With five minutes left, Northampton threw on striker Chris Freestone in a desperate effort to salvage a point after Lawrence had brought on Alan White to sit in front of the Hatters' back four.

Frain gave the home team a late scare in the last minute but Mitchell Thomas cleared his dangerous cross to the far post.

Sub Heggs then tried a theatrical dive in the box that could have earned him a second yellow card following one for an earlier assault on Alexander.

The lively McIndoe and sub Andrew Fotiadis both had late chances but could not convert them and left the Hatters with a scoreline that flattered Northampton Town.

LUTON: Kelvin Davis, Graham Alexander, Mitchell Thomas, Matthew Spring (Alan White 81), Steve Davis, Marvin Johnson, Ray McKinnon, Sean Evers, Stuart Douglas, (Andrew Fotiadis 81) Phil Gray, Michael McIndoe.

NORTHAMPTON: Andy Woodman, Ali Gibb, John Frain, Ian Sampson, Dougie Hodgson (Chris Freestone 85), Sean Parrish, James Hunt, Paul Wilkinson, Carlo Corazzin, Dave Savage (Carl Heggs 54), Colin Hill.