

Royals humbled by King George

LUTON'S lucky leprechaun Liam George gave Hatters fans a victory to treasure at Reading's Madejski Stadium.

The impish Irishman grabbed an 86th-minute winner – his third goal in two games – to seal the Hatters first triumph at the Royals' impressive new home.

Last season, Lennie Lawrence's men went down 3-0 in the stadium's curtain-raising fixture but George and the resurgent Andrew Fotiadis were both on target to avoid any chance of an encore of that outcome.

An expectant crowd of over 18,000 watched the previous fixture.

On Saturday, the majestic Madejski stadium was only a third full and the home fans were not amused as Luton's crop of home-grown talent humbled a Reading side, assembled for millions.

The unbeaten Hatters started the season as 50-1 outsiders for the title with few takers.

Well-fancied Reading were 8-1 third favourites and, by the end of the season, may justify that tag.

But on Saturday the gap in class between the two sides did not correspond

match facts

READING 1 LUTON TOWN 2

● **READING:** Scott Howie, Stuart Gray, Barry Hunter, Chris Casper, Darren Caskey, Jim McIntyre (Nicky Forster, 55), Peter Grant, Keith Scott, Martin Williams, Andy Gurney, Nell Smith.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Stuart Fraser, Matthew Taylor, Matthew Spring, Julian Watts, Marvin Johnson, Gary Doherty, Paul McLaren, Phil Gray, Andrew Fotiadis (Michael McIndoe, 79), Liam George.

Subs not used: Efetobore Sodje, Alan White, Ray McKinnon, Daniel Tate.

● **Shots on target:** Reading 4, Luton 4.

● **Off target:** Reading 7, Luton 6.

● **Corners:** Reading 9, Luton 4.

● **Attendance:** 8,741.

● **Referee:** Steve Bennett (Orpington).

● **Top Hatter:** Fotiadis – skill and industry.

with the gap in bookmakers' odds as Mr Madejski's wallet continues to struggle to bring instant success to Reading.

Probably the best flutter of the weekend was on Fotiadis, a generous 12-1 for first goalscorer.

The former England youth international is delivering the form he offered glimpses of at the end of last season and was a constant menace to the home team during the first hour.

Luton's best chances in an entertaining first period were created by strong Fotiadis runs, Phil Gray's side-

footed shot forcing a save from Scott Howie, and George's control letting him down at the crucial moment.

Teenager Matthew Taylor also went close early on with a vicious curling free kick that Howie tipped over.

And it was the 17-year-old wing back's magical left boot that began the move for Fotiadis' opening goal.

His 50-yard crossfield pass released Gray on the right and the Northern Ireland's cross was whipped on to the head of Fotiadis, who stole in front of the home defence to power home.

Until that moment, Reading had enjoyed a slight territorial advantage over the visitors without really troubling Nathan Abbey's goal.

But within two minutes of the Hatters going in front the scores were level, ex-Hatter Martin Williams squeezing in between Abbey and Julian Watts to poke the ball in after Keith Scott's flick on.

Both sides then searched for a winning goal with Abbey doing well to hold on to a strong shot on the turn by £650,000 Reading substitute Nicky Forster.

On 79 minutes, Lawrence replaced a tired Fotiadis with busy midfielder Michael McIndoe and seven minutes later the 19-year-old Scotsman had conjured up a winner for George.

George had been pushing further forward in the second half in his role behind front two Fotiadis and Gray but with McIndoe's introduction he became an out-and-out striker.

Taylor's quick throw-in caught the home defence napping and McIndoe's left-wing cross was steered in at the near post by an ecstatic George.

The Hatters then survived a late scare when Scott's close range diving header went wide.



Lennie's verdict

I think we deserved to win over 90 minutes for our spirit, football and commitment. We finished the strongest and I think looked the more dangerous side on the break.