



■ Skipper Marvin Johnson is robbed in full flight by Gillingham's Paul Smith



■ Liam George is brought down by Hessenthaler to give the Hatters a penalty

By George, it's double delight

LIAM George bagged his third double of the season as Hatters bounced back from an early setback.

After falling behind to a 16th-minute strike from Junior Lewis, it looked like a physical Gillingham side would become the first visiting team to grab three league points at Kenilworth Road this season – despite being without their goal machine Bob Taylor, the division's second top scorer.

Hatters' defence wasted several opportunities to clear their lines, then seemed to stop and stare as Andy Thompson found Lewis unmarked in a central position ten yards from goal.

The Gillingham striker needed no second invitation and side-footed home past a helpless Nathan Abbey.

But from then on all the football came from Luton, though it wasn't until an effort from Julian Watts two minutes from the break that the visitors' resolute defence came close to being breached.

Matthew Spring's free kick rebounded back off the wall, the ball was clipped back into the danger area and keeper Vince Bartram was caught flapping in no man's land.

Watts hammered goalwards from 15 yards, but with the keeper stranded, the ball took a crucial deflection off a defender and fizzed inches wide.

Luton Town 3 Gillingham 1

Report by Pete Kenyon

Pictures by Andy Handley

With the visitors' defence apparently on top, Luton seemed to have their work cut out – but a half-time look at the statistics would have given them hope.

Of the 14 league goals, the Gills had conceded in this year's campaign prior to yesterday, all but one have come in the second half.

Five minutes after the break Hatters were adding to that statistic – George converting a penalty he had won after Andy Hessenthaler whipped his legs away as the tricky forward turned the ex-Hornet inside out in the box.

Just after the hour, Watts made a crucial block to deny the lively Manny Omoyinmi after Abbey fumbled Hessenthaler's cross, and within two minutes Luton had gone up the other end and scored.

Neil Midgley flicked a superb pass down the right wing for George, whose pace took him outside Brian McGlinchey.

The Republic of Ireland junior international then whipped in a low cross which Stuart Douglas managed to get a crucial touch on at the near post to deflect in to the far corner for his first goal in 19 matches.

Paul McLaren had a long-range effort saved at full stretch by Bartram, but 17 minutes from time Luton sealed the points

with a superb solo goal from George, who now has seven goals this term.

The youngster picked the ball up 35 yards out and instantly made up his mind to go for goal. After leaving two defenders in his wake and rounding Bartram on the outside, he coolly slotted home from a tight angle before starting on his customary extravagant celebration.

Shellshocked Gillingham and their impressive army of fans, who almost filled the Oak Road stand, could scarcely believe how they had fallen to pieces.

But in truth they had been mugged by a young Hatters side who completely outplayed them – and were still able to mix it when it mattered.

With skipper Marvin Johnson, Julian Watts and Gary Doherty playing like men inspired at the back, Liam George's skill up front and the blend of power and finesse from Paul McLaren and Matthew Spring in midfield, Hatters are a team to match any in the second division at the moment – if only they could improve on their miserable away record.

Keeper Nathan Abbey too is growing in confidence – and despite having little to do yesterday afternoon was there when it mattered to produce a fine flying save to deny Omoyinmi's long-range drive late on. **Luton: Abbey, Fraser, Watts, Doherty, Johnson, George, McLaren, (McIndoe 85), Douglas, Spring, Midgley, (Locke 80), Taylor. Subs not used: Kandol, Sodje, Tate.**

Attendance: 6,394 – highest of the season.



■ Liam George steps up to slot home the spot kick

FA Cup draw

Luton Town have drawn Boston United or Kingstonian at home on October 30 in the FA Cup first round proper.