

Double ace Liam leads the Irish jig of joy

LIAM GEORGE returned from international duty to shine for Gillingham with a two-goal blast on Saturday.

The Hatters' leading scorer missed last Saturday's 2-1 defeat at Oldham because of an Eire under-21 international call-up in Macedonia.

But he returned with a bang, bagging a brace to take his tally up to eight for the season and celebrating each with a cheeky Irish jig!

Luton trailed 1-0 at the break after Junior Lewis' 17th-minute strike but George provided the game's turning point on 52 minutes.

A neat passing move involving Paul McLaren and Neil Midgley released George, whose trickery drew a foul from ex-Watford midfielder Andy Hessenthaler just inside the visitors' penalty box.

George took the spot-kick himself, sending Vince Bartram the wrong way with a cool sidefooted finish into the Gillingham keeper's bottom left-hand corner.

Stuart Douglas then got his first in 19 games when he turned in Midgley's low right-wing cross at the near post on 65 minutes, bringing a welcome end to a desperate barren spell.

And George then sealed victory in stylish fashion with another collector's item to add to his array of spectacular strikes at Kenilworth Road this season.

The fleet-footed 20-year-old danced through two Gillingham challenges before rounding Bartram and slotting into an empty net for a super solo effort.

It was the final flourish of a spirited second-half comeback after a strong Gillingham outfit had taken a one-goal advantage into the break.

First choice strikers Robert Taylor and Carl Asaba were both missing from the visitors line-up, but Lewis and Andy Thomson looked adequate replacements early on.

Lewis opened the scoring after a one-two with Thomson carved open the Hatters defence and he drilled a low shot past Nathan Abbey.

At the other end, Luton's three-pronged attack struggled to penetrate an uncompromising Gillingham back-line with Bartram saving the only notable home efforts of the half from George and Julian Watts.

But the penalty, a decision later contested by Gills' boss Peter Taylor, galvanised Lennie Lawrence's young side and restored the confidence that has helped them boast the best home record in the division.

match facts

LUTON TOWN 3 GILLINGHAM 1

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Stuart Fraser, Julian Watts, Gary Doherty, Marvin Johnson, Liam George, Paul McLaren (Michael McIndoe, 86), Stuart Douglas, Matthew Spring, Neil Midgley (Adam Locke, 81), Matthew Taylor. Subs not used: Tresor Kandol, Efe Sodje, Daniel Tate.

● **GILLINGHAM:** Vince Bartram, Paul Smith (John Hodge, 78), Barry Ashby, Guy Butters (Nayron Nosworthy, 78), Andy Hessenthaler, Manny Omoiyimil, Mark Saunders, Adrian Pennock, Junior Lewis, Andy Thomson, Brian McGlinchey.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 8 Gillingham 4.

● **Off target:** Luton 5 Gillingham 1.

● **Corners:** Luton 9 Gillingham 5.

● **Top Hatter:** George - on fire.

Aside from George's goal-scoring heroics, his Irish under-21 team-mate Gary Doherty enjoyed a solid return in defence and midfield lynchpins Matthew Spring and McLaren were both impressive.

Saturday's outcome also carried a peculiar twist of fate.

It was fitting that on the first Saturday after coming out of receivership Luton should secure a home victory over Gillingham.

The first Saturday in receivership had also resulted in three points at Kenilworth Road against the Kent club back in March!

Lennie's verdict

“It was a big day and it's a big step for us. It's worth more than three points psychologically because it's the first time we've come from behind to win. I've seen Gillingham defend one-goal leads a million times before but we built up a head of steam in the second-half and, for a 20-minute period, slaughtered them. They chose not to mark Liam and if he gets the ball in key areas he will cause damage.”

