



■ Julian Watts nets his first goal for the Hatters against Reading



■ Liam George gets in the thick of the action to score for Hatters

By George, Liam's back on the goal trail again

LIAM George rediscovered his goalscoring touch but Hatters were made to fight all the way.

Reading might have gone into yesterday's game in the dreaded drop zone and without a league win in 12 but can count themselves unlucky not to have scratched a point.

The stage seemed to be set for a comfortable win when Julian Watts netted his first goal for Hatters in only the 18th minute.

But the introduction of former Kenilworth Road star Sean Evers just after the half hour seemed to galvanise the visitors.

Gavin McGowan – playing his first game of the season – had to be alert to rob Nicky Foster in front of an unguarded net seven minutes from the break.

And two minutes later Andy Gurney wasted a glorious chance to level after finding himself all alone in front of goal but he headed wide.

Watts nearly added to his rare goal in the second period but his looping header hit the roof of the net and seconds later Phil Gray forced

Luton Town 3 Reading 1
Report by PETE KENYON
Pictures by ANDY HANDLEY

Scott Howie into a flying stop after his curling left-footer looked like bending into the corner.

But then came the customary disaster.

Evers flicked a through ball with the outside of his boot and Darren Caskey sprung the offside trap.

With only Nathan Abbey to beat, Caskey waltzed into the box but lost control of his partner – in this case the ball.

The Luton keeper should have cleared his lines gratefully but went down far too early, allowed the ball to wriggle out of his grip, and Caskey needed no second invitation.

To their credit, heads did not go down, and with Gray, Adam Locke – playing in central midfield in place of the suspended Matthew Spring – and Watts really getting stuck in, Luton looked to regain the initiative.

Almost immediately, Gray had the ball in the net – ramming home after Stuart Douglas's inch-perfect cross picked him out unmarked at

the far post – but referee Richard Beeby ruled the Northern Ireland international had used a hand to bring down the ball.

A furious Gray earned himself a yellow for his protestations, and to be fair, it is difficult to see why he would have chosen to use an arm to control a chest-high ball given the amount of time and space he was afforded by Reading's defence.

But four minutes later the protests were well and truly forgotten.

Mr Beeby made amends by playing an unlikely looking advantage when Locke was impeded centrefield as he passed out wide to Douglas.

After a quick glance, Douglas chipped into the box, George took a gamble in lurking behind his marker, and the gamble paid off when the ball caught the strong wind and sailed over the defender's head.

The out-of-sorts striker – without a goal in seven games – then wasted no time in bringing the ball down before turning and rifling into the far corner.

Three minutes later he should have scored again after keeper Howie passed a ball straight to him, but John Polston put enough pressure on

to put George off.

Reading threw everything into attack and the match turned into a cup tie.

Fifteen minutes from time, Abbey made an important stop with his legs after Caskey sent Keith Scott clear, but then failed to catch a series of swirling crosses into the six-yard box.

But try as Reading might to grab an equaliser, it was Luton who killed the game right at the death as the visitors found themselves short in numbers at the back.

Gray showed good control in the centre of the pitch, rolled the ball into the inside-left channel, and George raced clear.

Howie did his best to narrow the angle but the Irishman's low drive went underneath his body to wrap up a valuable three points for Hatters.

The result moves Luton up to 10th as the teams just above them slipped up, but the gap between them and a play-off place remains static at ten points.

Luton: Abbey, Boyce, Watts, Doherty, Johnson, George, Locke, McGowan, Gray, Douglas (Fotiadis 82), Scarlett.

Attendance: 6,044.

Man of the match: Douglas.