

# Royals left reeling as King George saves the Hatters

A PAIR of majestic Liam George finishes shot down the Royals at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

The Hatters leading scorer rediscovered his goalscoring touch to send Reading crashing to a 3-1 defeat in a real 'Princes against Paupers' clash.

Reading may have spent a king's ransom on assembling their squad but it was Luton, with only Phil Gray in Saturday's 16 having cost a penny in transfer fees, who completed a league double over their Berkshire rivals.

George, with just one goal from his previous 13 games, struck on 70 and 90 minutes to take his tally to 14 for the season.

Julian Watts had earlier given the Hatters a first-half lead before ex-Spurs midfielder Darren Caskey levelled the scores just past the hour.

Saturday's result was the seventh time Lennie Lawrence's men have scored three or more goals at Kenilworth Road this season and only Burnley have now scored as many goals at home in the division.

Another plus was that the impressive win came in the absence of six players with Andre Scarlett and Gavin McGowan both making their first starts of the season.

Pint-sized Scarlett was Lawrence's unlikely choice to fill the problematic central-midfield spot and responded adequately while McGowan patrolled the left flank well in place of Matthew Taylor.

Phil Gray's return to the side as a target man and the fulcrum of attacking moves is also freeing Stuart Douglas and George to concentrate on their strengths.

Douglas was unlucky not to open the scoring when his looping header produced an athletic fingertip save from Reading keeper Scott Howie on 12 minutes.

Watts broke the deadlock soon after with his first goal for Luton and only the fifth of his career.

The 28-year-old fired in after Gary Doherty had headed Adam

**EX-HATTERS boss Ray Harford has joined the coaching staff at Division Two promotion seekers Millwall. Harford, who quit as director of football at Oxford last week, will coach at all levels of the club and is a direct replacement for the recently departed David Kemp, now with Portsmouth.**

Locke's free kick across goal.

Reading enjoyed a lot of first-half possession but their confidence in front of goal is shocking with Nicky Forster and Keith Scott both guilty of squandering good chances.

After the break, Gray hit a curling shot that Howie did well to claw away from his top corner but minutes later Reading were level.

The Hatters may have an excellent goalscoring record at home but they have not kept a clean sheet at Kenilworth Road in 14 games since August and there was an air of inevitability about the visitors equaliser.

Ex-Town midfielder Sean Eve-

rs, only on the pitch as a substitute, released Caskey who rounded Nathan Abbey far too comfortably and shot into an empty goal.

Moments later, Gray finished off the move of the match, involving both George and Douglas, before seeing his effort controversially ruled out for handball.

But the Hatters did not have to wait too long to go back in front, George displaying immaculate control to bring down Douglas' cross in the six-yard box before swivelling to fire past Howie.

Abbey then saved his side by thwarting Scott in another one-on-one but as Reading pushed up, desperate to avoid a club record 13th game without a win, gaps appeared at the back and Andrew Fotiadis, Douglas and Scarlett were all guilty of dreadful final passes on the break.

George finally put the game beyond doubt, surviving offside appeals to coolly shoot past Howie after a through ball from Gray, who finished the game in midfield.

## match facts

### LUTON TOWN 3 READING 1

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Emmerson Boyce, Julian Watts, Gary Doherty, Marvin Johnson, Liam George, Adam Locke, Gavin McGowan, Phil Gray, Stuart Douglas (Andrew Fotiadis, 82), Andre Scarlett. Subs not used: Fraser, Ayres, Kandol, Tate.

● **READING:** Scott Howie, Linvoy Primus, Andy Bernal (Martin Williams, 72), John Polston, Andy Gurney, Phil Parkinson, Darren Caskey, Stuart Gray (Mark Nicholls, 84), Nicky Forster, Keith Scott, Neil Smith (Sean Evers, 35).

● **Shots on target:** Luton 5, Reading 4.

● **Off target:** Luton 2, Reading 5.

● **Corners:** Luton 3, Reading 6.

● **Referee:** Richard Beeby (Abington Vale).

● **Top Hatter:** Watts – impenetrable defending.

## Lennie Lawrence's verdict

I was absolutely delighted with them. It was a big game on two counts. Firstly, to get winning again after a draw and a defeat and secondly because the squad was tested like never before this season. Liam came back to form and that was the key difference because when the score was 1-1 it was a vital time. It also encourages me greatly when I consider who wasn't playing.

