

Gray leaves Luton in the pink

99/00

By Timothy Collings

Luton Town..... 2

Stoke City..... 1

TWO second-half goals from former Northern Ireland international striker Phil Gray helped Luton keep alive their hopes of a place in the play-offs when they came from behind to beat Stoke in a rousing contest on a difficult, soft surface at Kenilworth Road last night.

Lennie Lawrence's team had appeared to be heading for defeat after dominating most of the game until Gray struck either side of a dangerous effort by Stoke substitute Kyle Lightbourne, who had a shot cleared off the line by Matthew Taylor. James O'Connor had put the visitors ahead after 32 minutes.

Luton, with Taylor recalled after suspension for the first time since he was sent off at Stoke last month, were soon into their stride and made all of the early running.

It was one-way traffic until Stoke, in a rare counter-attack, stole into the lead through O'Connor. The goal was made on the left by Clive Clarke, who threaded his way in from the touchline and whose pass was side-footed home with ease.

Luton continued to press and they drew level with 62 minutes gone. The goal came from a corner, won by Gray, who then headed home Taylor's cross at the far post.

Stoke were dangerous on the counter, and Clarke almost forced another goal when Nathan Abbey spread himself to save. But it was Luton who eventually snatched a second goal after 78 minutes when Gray swept the ball home from a cross by Douglas.

Luton Town: Abbey; Boyce (McGowan 64), Watts, Doherty, Johnson, George (Fotiadis 74), Locke, Spring, Taylor, Gray, Douglas. **Subs:** Scarlett, Fraser, Tate (g). **Booked:** Johnson, Abbey.

Stoke City: Ward; Hansson; Clarke, Mohan, Jacobsen, Kippe, O'Connor, Gunnarsson, Kavanagh, Oldfield (Lightbourne 64), Connor (Thorne 84). **Subs:** Robinson, Petty, Muggleton (g). **Booked:** Mohan, Kippe, O'Connor.

Referee: W Burns (Scarborough).