



■ Paul McLaren fires home (above) and celebrates (above left)

Two-goal riposte from ace Tommo

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Stoke City 1, Luton Town 3

PETER Thomson broke his scoring duck as Hatters embarrassed promotion-chasing Stoke at the Britannia Stadium.

A brace from the tall striker was the perfect answer to manager Lil Fuccillo's midweek warning that it was time the £100,000 buy started repaying the investment.

Midfielder Paul McLaren got Hatters on their way with a rare goal on 15 minutes but defender Nicki Mohan equalised for the Potters after 34 minutes when Marvin Johnson unluckily slipped over.

There were several team changes from last week's disaster at Port Vale.

Emmerson Boyce was taken ill and Johnson drafted in as a late replacement. Kent Karlsen and Lee Nogan only made the bench with Adam Locke and Thomson coming into the starting eleven in their place.

Everything was different this week. The new line-up started in bright fashion with Petri Helin popping up in attack, freed by Locke's holding presence alongside him in midfield. Early on, Matthew Taylor was stopped by a dubious tackle on the edge of the area, and in another attack had his fierce shot beaten down. Helin's follow up was also partially blocked on its way through to keeper Karl Muggleton.

Luton's opener came when Liam George twisted and turned on the left, but Matthew Spring couldn't quite control his cross. He managed to roll it back for McLaren to lash a sweet 30 yarder past Muggleton's right hand.

Johnson preserved the lead with a brave diving header back to Nathan Abbey ten minutes later under severe pressure from Peter Thorne, but fellow striker James O'Connor should have done better when given a free header from another Clarke pin-point cross.

It was new boy Adrian Whitbread's turn



■ Peter Thomson wheels away after scoring Luton's second

to save the day with a sliding clearance when Stoke launched a series of corner kicks into the Town box, but Luton's first corner almost ended with them adding to their lead.

There was an almighty scramble when Taylor's flag kick came in. One looping effort was headed off the line and Whitbread could have had better luck with a back flick that flew straight into the keeper's hands.

Stoke went straight up the other end to equalise. Johnson slipped over as Michael Hansson crossed low from the right, Mohan took full advantage and drove in an accurate ten yarder that Abbey got a hand to, but couldn't stop as the power took it into the net.

Deep into injury time, Abbey's brilliant save set up the second half victory. Thorne powered in a header from Graham Kavanagh's long throw and Abbey tipped it over in spectacular fashion.

When Helin was upended by Tony Dorigo six minutes into the second period, Taylor's accurate free-kick to the far post was headed back by Whitbread for Thomson to net by hooking the ball over his shoulder, completely deceiving Muggleton.

Just after the hour mark, Thomson completed a miserable week for City, still in a state of shock after the midweek 8-0 drubbing by Liverpool.

A superb interchange of passes on the halfway line put George away down the left wing. At full pace Thomson drew away from his marker, but was driven a little wide by George's careful low centre.

It mattered little however to the big striker, who coolly chipped Muggleton from an angle to give the Town the rare luxury of a two goal lead.

The defence then had to perform heroics to snuff out a spirited Stoke revival, but Abbey's only significant work thereafter was safely to collect numerous Stoke crosses with some style.

After the game Town Manager Lil Fuccillo said: "Our defenders fought for their lives. Thomson has had a kick up the backside and rewarded himself with his goals today."

Luton Town: Abbey, Whitbread, Watts, Johnson, Helin, Spring, McLaren, Locke, Taylor, Thomson (Fotiadis 89), George (Karlsen 90). Subs not used: Ovendale, Fraser, Nogan.

Attendance; 12,389.
Man of the Match: Peter Thomson.