Fireworks as Town target bags a brace

TRANSFER target Chris Greenacre shot down the Hatters with the kind of explosive performance that would have made Guy Fawkes proud.

The 23-year-old striker's two-goal blast capped a sparkling display that lit up Field Mill just two days before November 5.

And there were more fireworks as Mansfield thumped Luton 4-1 with three players sent off and Greenacre also missing a penalty.

Mansfield boss Bill Dearden, the man who plotted the Hatters' downfall, then fired a hands-off message to Joe Kinnear, whose £300,000 bid for 13-goal Greenacre has been turned down.

A delighted Dearden added: "We absolutely murdered them and I think it should have been more than 4-1. We might only be little Mansfield but we will keep going and see what happens at the end of the season."

Kinnear was left to reflect on his side's third defeat against a top-five team this season after previous setbacks against early pace-setters Plymouth and Rochdale.

He generously gave credit to the home team afterwards but admitted that there were too many "individual disappointments" in his side and apologised for the performance to an excellent travelling army of 2,166 fans.

The prolific Dean Crowe scored a late consolation after Greenacre's brace and goals from Martin Pemberton and Shayne Bradley had given the Stags an unassailable lead.

Chris Coyne was also red-carded after two bookable offences around the hour mark, while Mansfield carelessly had both Pemberton and Bradley sent off in the last minute of the game for dissent.

Greenacre might have been dynamite in front of goal but his ammunition was provided by wide men and fellow conspirators Wayne Corden and Liam Lawrence, who full-backs Aaron Skelton and Matthew Taylor struggled to contain all afternoon. Ahmet Brkovic and Jean-Louis Valois swapped flanks in an effort to combat the Mansfield pair's influence on proceedings, but the Frenchman offered little protection on either side and both players were eventually substituted.

Craig Disley also ran the centre of midfield for the home side and Kevin Nicholls' frustration earned him a yellow card that will mean he misses the FA Cup trip to Southend, as will Coyne.

Crowe and Greenacre are two of the division's in-form strikers and both went close early in Saturday's game.

Kevin Pilkington saved Crowe's 20-yard effort after just two minutes and, shortly afterwards, Greenacre tricked his way past Taylor before firing across goal.

Bradley, who proved a very useful foil for Greenacre, then headed wide before his striking partner claimed his 12th goal of the season.

Luton keeper Carl Emberson made a great save to keep out Greenacre's header from Lawrence's right-wing cross, but the Mansfield hit-man kept his composure to prod in the rebound.

Luton responded with a Brkovic volley that was saved by Pilkington and Crowe shot wide on 33 minutes after being put clear by a Nicholls header. But Mansfield continued to look dangerous and Corden went close from 20 yards early in the second-half.

The Stags won a penalty on 51 minutes for Russell Perrett's foul on Bradley but Greenacre clipped the bar with his spot-kick.

His miss only provided temporary respite for the Hatters as he made amends five minutes later, scoring from close range after Corden had waltzed past Skelton on the left.

Coyne became the first of 10 players – seven from Luton – to get their names taken by Premiership referee David Pugh when he fouled Disley on 60 minutes and, seconds later, the Australian centre-back received his marching orders after tangling with Bradley.

Pemberton rubbed salt into the Hatters' wounds with the subsequent free-kick, curling a left-footed effort beyond Emberson and into the top corner.

Bradley skipped past another ineffectual Skelton challenge on 79 minutes before beating a vulnerable Emberson with a confident finish into the top corner.

Only Emberson prevented the Mansfield striker from getting a second goal moments later as the beleaguered Hatters defence looked ready to surrender.

Matthew Spring should have pulled a goal back on 83 minutes but shot straight at Pilkington from close range.

Crowe did claim a close-range consolation five minutes from the end when he turned in an angrily-driven cross by Taylor, who had been released by a Steve Howard back heel.

It was the ex-Stoke striker's sixth goal in seven games for the Hatters and he also had a late volley cleared off the line.

Mansfield's win was marred by the mysterious late dismissals of Pemberton and Bradley but there was no time for Luton to capitalise on their opponents' numerical disadvantage.

The result left the Hatters still looking for a first league win at Field Mill. It is a wait that has now spanned 69 years and six matches since the first meeting – a 5-2 defeat in 1932!

Joe's view

"They took their chances. We did not take ours even though we had equally as many. It could have been 5-4. Chris Greenacre was head and shoulders above anybody else and his finishing was excellent. We are a much better side than that display and I could not foresee that result even at half-time but you have to give them credit. The two wide players ripped us apart and we could have done much better in the full back departments. In fact, we did not do anything defensively."

GET A GRIP: Hatters hit-man Dean Crowe tussles with Mansfield defender Adam Barrett during Saturday's 4-1 Division Three defeat at Field Mill. Picture: GARETH OWEN

playerwatch

TEENAGE FULL-BACK MATTHEW TAYLOR

OUR super new series Player Watch continues with a look at teenage terror Matthew Taylor. He came under the microscope in Saturday's clash with Mansfield.

- **Shots on target: 0**
- **Shots off target: 1**
- **Blocked shots: 0**
- **Passes to own player: 16**
- **Passes to opposition: 9**
- **Crosses to own player: 3**
- **Crosses to opposition: 2**
- **Pass completion rate: 63%**
- **Headers: 13**
- **Tackles: 2**
- **Clearances, blocks and interceptions: 16**
- **Dribble ball retained: 3**
- **Dribble ball lost: 3**
- **Dribble completion rate: 50%**
- **Fouls: 1**
- **Offsides: 0**

FINAL VERDICT: Taylor was kept occupied by right-winger Liam Lawrence and had little opportunity to make his characteristic drives forward, as is illustrated by a low cross count. When he did put in crosses he found a team-mate three times including Dean Crowe for the Hatters consolation. Defensively, Taylor made 13 headers but only completed two tackles.

SPOTLIGHT: Luton full-back Matthew Taylor in action against Mansfield.

matchfacts

- **MANSFIELD: Kevin Pilkington, Bobby Hassell, Adam Barrett, Les Robinson, Martin Pemberton, Liam Lawrence (Stuart Reddington, 90), Lee Williamson, Craig Disley, Wayne Corden, Chris Greenacre (Jason White, 81), Shayne Bradley. Subs not used: Michael Bingham, Danny Bacon, David Jervis.**
- **HATTERS: Carl Emberson, Aaron Skelton, Russell Perrett, Chris Coyne, Matthew Taylor, Ahmet Brkovic (Ian Hillier, 64), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Jean-Louis Valois (Adrian Forbes, 57), Steve Howard, Dean Crowe. Subs not used: Mark Ovendale, Peter Holmes, Richard Dryden.**
- **Shots on target: Mansfield 9 Luton 10.**
- **Off target: Mansfield 8 Luton 6.**
- **Corners: Mansfield 7 Luton 3.**
- **Referee: David Pugh (Wirral).**
- **Top Hatter: Crowe – another predatory goal from an in-form striker.**

Spurs feeder club story rubbished

JOE Kinnear has strongly refuted a Daily Express story that suggested the Hatters were ready to become a feeder club for Tottenham Hotspur.

The Hatters manager, who used to play for the White Hart Lane club, said: "There is no chance of a feeder club deal with Tottenham. We are doing quite well without their support and I do not want to be anybody's feeder club. We exist in our own right."