

Hats off to a classic cup tie

Stevenage Boro 3 Luton Town 4 MARCUS CRAWLEY reports

A **SUBLIME** hat-trick from Ahmet Brkovic knocked gallant Boro out of the **LDV Vans Trophy on Tuesday night.**

The Croat scored three times in six extraordinary minutes as the Hatters rode their luck to go through.

It was tough on Boro, who bossed large periods of the match and scored three themselves after their recent goal drought.

Boro boss Wayne Turner said: "It was deja vu with the result not reflecting our performance.

"We scored a few goals this time but conceded too many.

"Luton gave us a lesson in passing and movement for 10 minutes.

"They had a purple patch and we couldn't cope with it.

"We got punished in that spell and it was in contrast to the rest of the game."

The Hatters fielded a strong team with the majority of the starting line-up having first team experience, including hot-shot Tony Thorpe.

Boro went ahead in bizarre circumstances after just six minutes, befitting the nature of the evening. Jude Stirling's long throw was punched in off his own man Kevin

Nicholls by Luton goalkeeper Carl Emberson.

With Richard Scott impressing in midfield, Boro were worthy of their lead and it was a surprise when the Hatters levelled on 33 minutes. Thorpe's looping header took an age to drop in from a Nicholls cross.

Boro pressed at the end of the half and after Simon Travis' cross-shot had hit the bar, it was third time lucky for Richard Pacquette.

The on-loan youngster had already gone close with a header and missed a one-on-one before he finished emphatically two minutes into injury-time.

Lacklustre Luton came out firing in the second-

half and Thorpe headed against the bar.

Emberson's brilliant save from Michael Blackwood was probably the turning point as the Hatters then enjoyed three lightning strikes.

Three fine Brkovic finishes, who otherwise had a quiet game, turned the game on its head as the Boro defence was torn apart.

The home side recovered their composure and Scott's exquisite free-kick in the 71st minute halved the deficit.

Sub Jean-Michel Sigere had a couple of half chances, first heading on to the roof of the net and then unable to get a decisive touch after a typical surging run and cross from Travis.

The night's entertainment ended with an unbelievable Emberson save from Gary MacDonald in injury-time to deny Boro a deserved crack at extra-time and a possible penalty shoot-out.

Turner added: "I was pleased with the atmosphere and the match was played in a good competitive spirit."



■ Boro's opening goal against the Hatters on Tuesday night



■ Boro's Richard Pacquette goes in hard against Paul Hughes

MATCH FACTS

BORO v Luton Town

6.....	Corners.....	4
17.....	Goal attempts.....	10
10.....	Shots on target.....	6
6.....	Shots off target.....	3
1.....	Hit woodwork.....	1
5.....	Offsides.....	6
21.....	Free-kicks.....	8

BORO: Westhead 7, Travis 8*, Fraser 8, Wormull 7 (Jackson 69m, 6), Howell 7 (Blackwood 46m, 8), Riddle 7, Stirling 7, Midson 6 (Sigere 57m, 6), Pacquette 8, Scott 8, G MacDonald 7. **SUBS NOT USED:** Wilson, Boyd.

HATTERS: Emberson, Skelton, Nicholls (Leary 46m), Thorpe, Brkovic, Holmes, Hughes, Mansell, (Judge 46m) Foley (Johnson 71m), Kimble, Deeney. **SUBS NOT USED:** Ovendale, Barnett.

BOOKED: Riddle 90m – Boro.

ATT: 2,601.

REF: Mr P Rejer.

Subs must play at least 20 minutes to gain our player rating.