



Hapless Hatters so nearly scalped

03/04 EAC

**Thurrock 1
Luton Town 1**

WOEFUL Luton were left clinging on to their FA Cup hopes by a thread after a humbling draw against non-league Thurrock.

Despite being three leagues above the plucky Pirates, Hatters couldn't make their class shine through and for much of the game were second best.

Emmerson Boyce looked to have put Hatters' on their way, but England Beach Football international Terry Bowes grabbed Thurrock's deserved equaliser and only a strong goalkeeping display from Marlon Beresford kept Luton in it when ex-Hatter Tresor Kandol fluffed a sitter late on.

The Friday night game was the opener to the weekend's FA Cup first round ties and Hatters will be looking to make progress to the third round at least – when the Premiership sides join the competition. But first Luton had to dispatch a side better-known for the Lakeside shopping centre than football.

Two changes were made from the side that drew at Bristol City last weekend. Alan Neilson was ruled out through injury and Ian Hillier took over at right back. Gary McSheffrey's employers Coventry City decided they didn't want the striker to be cup-tied, so in came Enoch Showunmi to partner Adrian Forbes up front.

The gangly striker scored his first goal mid-week at the 2-1 win in the LDV Vans Trophy tie at Rushden where Hatters fielded a much weaker team.

But manager Mike Newell showed Ryman Premier outfit Thurrock respect by naming a strong side that – on paper – looked to see Hatters' cruise through to the next round.

The FA Cup has a long tradition of non-league clubs scalping their more illustrious counterparts and ex-Hatter-turned-TV pundit Chris Kamara brought his Sky cameras with him to deepest Essex in the hope of a cup upset.

Thurrock – currently lying in 5th place in the Ryman Premier League – knocked out conference side Dagenham and Redbridge to face reach the first round for the first time in their history and their side was made up of the usual collection of semi-pros – journeymen footballers and youngsters.

Some added spice to this tie came in the shape of striker Kandol and winger Cliff Akurang. The Thurrock duo both began their



■ No way past: Sub Michael Leary takes on beach soccer ace Terry Bowes

careers at Kenilworth Road before being released into the football wilderness.

Neither player set the world alight at Luton – in fact Kandol was more famous for avoiding train fares – but the scene seemed set for these two old boys to show Luton what they let go.

The near-capacity crowd were behind their team from the off and had plenty to cheer about.

In the first minute, right back David Collis – Thurrock's dead-ball specialist – curled his free kick from the edge of the box to Beresford's right and the goalkeeper saved well at his near post.

What Thurrock lacked in technical ability in the first half they made up for in sheer effort. Luton were constantly closed down and a second touch on the ball was at a premium.

Luton still looked in control and although not creating that much for Forbes and Showunmi they limited Thurrock to hitting long balls over the top that captain Chris Coyne and Emmerson Boyce dealt with comfortably.

On 38 minutes Boyce turned goalscorer as Hatters capitalised on the best move of the half.

Just before the goal Chris Coyne saw a header well saved by goalkeeper Paul Gothard and Luton packed bodies into the box for the resulting corner.

Matthew Spring whipped his cross into the penalty area and from the mass of players in and around the six yard box a leg from Boyce prodded home for his first of the season.

So 1-0 up at half time and with Thurrock running out of steam after the initial burst minutes, Hatters' looked to have done their job.

Ah, the romance of the cup! Thurrock ran out for the second 45 minutes with nothing to lose and Luton did their best to make the non-league side look like world-beaters.

It was all Thurrock. They piled on the pressure against a nervous-looking Hatters. On 56 minutes Collis had another free kick

on the edge of the box. This curling effort was so close it deceived the crowd who were convinced it hit the back of, rather than the side, net.

Collis popped up again on 70 minutes when a laid-off pass was blasted from 25-yards out that went just wide.

However it wasn't all doom and gloom for Hatters' – substitute Michael Leary gave a good account of himself as a ball winner, giving the midfield some much-needed steel. And on 65 minutes Spring blasted goalwards from a tight angle to force a save out of Gothard.

But Thurrock were not to be denied and ten minutes from time Bowes wrote his name into the Pirates history book with his equaliser.

Substitute Paul Linger – who came on for the impressive Akurang – slid the ball through for the onrushing Bowes who finished well from ten yards out.

It was no more than Thurrock deserved but it could have been so much better if Kandol had read the script on 86 minutes.

Luton were caught on the counter-attack and a long ball up field found Kandol, but he was tightly marked by Boyce. The Luton reject broke free and dodged past Boyce like he was a Thameslink ticket inspector. He found himself one-on-one with the 'keeper but as Luton fans' hearts stood still, Beresford didn't and rushed off his line forcing Kandol into a decision. Kandol chose a tame lob that Beresford saved with ease.

After such a poor second half display Luton will be glad to take Thurrock back to Kenilworth Road on Tuesday, November 18.

Newell was brief with his summary of the game: "I wanted the ref to blow the whistle – I didn't want to watch anymore. They had the better chances. We weren't brave enough to want the ball – we just didn't play football against them."

"We are still in the cup and if we beat Thurrock in the replay then no-one will care about tonight."

Luton Town: Beresford; Hillier, Coyne, Boyce, Davis; Mansell (Leary 60), Spring, Robinson, Brkovic; Forbes (Crowe 74), Showunmi.
Subs (unused): Brill, Barnett, Judge

Referee: Mike Thorpe, Suffolk

GOALSCORERS:
Thurrock: Bowes, 80
Luton Town: Boyce, 38

SHOTS ON TARGET
Thurrock: 5
Luton Town: 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Thurrock: 4
Luton Town: 2

CORNERS
Thurrock: 7
Luton Town: 10

OFFSIDE
Thurrock: 6
Luton Town: 1

BOOKINGS
Thurrock: Purdie, (10), McFarlane (63), Heffer (69), Kandol (82).
Luton Town: Coyne (49), Showunmi (61)

ATTENDANCE: 1,551

HATTERS STAR MAN:
MARLON BERESFORD;
Tremendous late save kept Luton in the hat for the 2nd round draw



■ My ball: Tresor Kandol goes up against Sol Davis in a scrappy game



■ Hospital ball: Thurrock's David Collis and Matthew Spring tangle