

Hatters hold off the Dons

HATTERS 1 MK DONS 0

HATTERS' weekend promotion party at Kenilworth Road failed to turn into the anticipated rout of struggling MK Dons.

But Luton were happy enough to take three points over their Buckinghamshire neighbours courtesy of visiting skipper Ben Chorley's own goal and edge ever closer to the League One title.

While the Town never quite found top gear, they did enough to see off a defensively minded Dons side who only managed one shot on target throughout 90 minutes that Marlon Beresford did superbly well to keep out.

The victory may have been slightly scrappy, but much of that was down to a physical Dons side who were fighting tooth and nail to avoid the dreaded drop.

Skipper Kevin Nicholls said on the win: "We knew we were promoted in the week before the game and people said that might make it difficult for us to get up for this one, but that wasn't the case.

"Milton Keynes are a lot better than when we played them earlier in the season and beat them quite comfortably at their place. But we still had plenty of chances and probably should have scored a lot more than we did."

It's safe to say that MK Dons are not held in high regard by Luton fans due to their relocation and creation of "Franchise football" close to Bedfordshire.

But the arrival of former Hatters hero Danny Wilson as boss has led to some Town followers offering small amounts of sympathy towards the Dons' relegation fight and Wilson himself was given a rousing reception by the home faithful.

Luton's promotion winning squad and management team were also treated to deafening pre-kick-off cheers from supporters who created a carnival atmo-

Own goal takes Luton closer to sealing the title

sphere with celebratory t-shirts, balloons and straw boaters. Hatters started by showing no pity for the Dons as Steve Howard let fly with a 25-yarder straight at Matt Baker after just 15 seconds.

Peter Holmes followed up with a 15-yard shot at Baker four minutes later before Howard glanced a header on to the top of the crossbar in the fifth minute.

As Town threatened to run riot, Hatters fans almost saw a repeat of the Lee Bowyer/Kieran Dyer fisticuffs at Newcastle as Dons defenders Chorley and Michel Pensee-Bilong angrily squared up to each other in the 14th minute.

Both received a talking to from referee Jamail Singh, but the clash seemed to do the visitors good as they tightened up until conceding an unfortunate, if rather spectacular own goal after half-an-hour.

Brkovic's run saw the ball squirm out to Foley and from his immediate cross, Chorley could only torpedo a diving header past Baker while trying to clear.

Dons almost levelled three minutes later when Dean Lewington crossed for Wade Small to head goalwards, only for Beresford to change his direction and acrobatically palm the ball over the bar.

The second-half saw the return of Steve Robinson as a substitute after his February groin operation. And Robbo, Howard and fellow substitute Warren Feeney all went closest to adding to the scoring with headers that flew off target.



STRENGTH: Rowan Vine holds off Dons' defender Michel Pensee-Bilong.



BRIAN STEIN'S VERDICT

"WE knew it was going to be tough because Milton Keynes have been fighting for their lives since Danny Wilson took over and that's how it transpired.

"For the first 20 minutes I thought we did ever so well and had the ball in their box, but we just didn't have our shooting boots on.

"In the end Ben Chorley headed into his own

goal, but we must have had about 10 clear chances and we're a bit disappointed we didn't manage to capitalise in the final third.

"We missed a lot of opportunities, but they defended quite well.

"If we'd have played them before Danny was there they probably would have packed it in, but they're a different team now."

STAR HATTER



SOL DAVIS: Town's full-back was up to his usual marauding tricks, attacking at every opportunity as well as defending solidly against the pacey Wade Small.

As early as the fourth minute Davis was overlapping as he kept the ball in and set up Peter Holmes for a strike. Another run drew a booking for Trent McClenahan in the 21st minute.

And the 25-year-old continued in the same vein after the break.

Stein praises Davis and Nico

HATTERS assistant boss Brian Stein has praised Town pair Kevin Nicholls and Sol Davis for their transformation this season.

Both tough-tackling players were troubled by suspensions and ill-discipline last term, but have been key parts of the side's success this year.

Stein said: "We've had referees and assessors asking if they are the same two players.

"They can't believe the difference, but we can. They're now thinking footballers as we knew they could be rather than thugs and it's made a big difference to the side.

"Sol's been a revelation and I can't speak highly enough of

him. He didn't get in the PFA team, but I can't think of a better left back in the league."

● Bobbers buses leave for Cranham on Saturday from Cranfield at 9am, pass pick-up points and leave Kenilworth Road, Luton at 10am. Prices are £14.50 adults, £12 juniors. Call 01234 750996. For Town on Tour travel details call 07960 567465.