

Black night

READING 1 LUTONTOWN 0

Hatters writer Andy MacKenzie reports from the Madejski Stadium

HATTERS' black kit curse struck again last night as they crashed to defeat at Reading in the Carling Cup second round.

John Oster bagged the winner for the Royals to make it three defeats in three outings for Luton in their new change strip this season.

Hatters started with goalkeeper Dean Brill in for the rested Marlon Beresford and Leon Barnett and Peter Holmes making their first starts of the season in place of injured pair Russell Perrett and Steve Robinson respectively.

Dean Morgan lined up against his former side after his free-transfer from the Royals to Hatters in the summer.

Reading probed early on as Stephen Hunt tested Brill with some teasing left-wing crosses that were well dealt with by the teenage Town stopper.

The best of the opening exchanges resulted in a wayward 20-yard effort from home midfielder James Harper in the 11th minute, while Sol Davis could only end a marauding run with a half-hearted shot at Marcus Hahnemann.

Pacey Royals forward Eric Obinna set up Hunt for a snapshot which he sent wide from the edge of the area in the 15th minute before showing his speed again three minutes later to outstrip Coyne and cross dangerously into the box, only for Barnett to make a timely interception.

Town responded with a Coyne header that landed on top of the net after a deep Carlos Edwards cross in the 25th minute in between two Morgan efforts – a quickly taken 25-yard free-kick and then a jinking run and left-footed shot – that both ended up in the side-netting.

Both sets of fans tried their best to lift the teams in the sparsely-filled Madejski, but the next chance didn't come until five minutes before half-time when Nicholls fed Steve Howard who ran through and slipped the ball past Hahnemann only to be flagged offside.

Hatters ended the half on the offensive again as Morgan swept a 20-yard right-footed shot six yards wide after the ball deflected into his path off home skipper Graeme Murty. The Town continued in the same vein straight after the break as Holmes fed Warren Feeney who could only shoot straight at Hahnemann from just inside the penalty area 40 seconds in.

A minute later Holmes was involved

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HATTERS



Referee: Mick Fletcher (Worcs)

Attendance: 6,941

again as he almost got on the end of a whipped-in Edwards cross after Feeney's neat lay-off.

The hard-working Feeney, buzzing around the field in his usual scurrying style, then neatly turned Ibrahima Sonko in the 52nd minute and spread play to Brkovic, who laid off for Morgan to scream a 24-yard effort just over the bar.

Town's momentum was briefly disrupted in the 55th minute, however, when Barnett limped off to be replaced by Keith Keane as an emergency centre-half and Reading responded by bringing on five-goal substitute Leroy Lita.

The change appeared to make little difference to the flow of the game as Luton continued to dictate and with Reading on the backfoot, Howard just failed to connect with a flighted left-footed Nicholls cross just after the hour.

Reading did manage to break forward when Obinna fortuitously wriggled clear of Keane and pulled back for Lita to see a shot deflect wide in the 71st minute.

But Luton immediately countered as Feeney yet again found space to centre for Howard to sidefoot just past the post.

All the hard work was undone by the Royals' winner 10 minutes from time when John Oster's curling free-kick from fully 40-yards out near the right-hand touchline evaded everyone to find the corner of the net.



Picture by Gareth Owen

BATTLE GROUND: Hatters' midfielder Peter Holmes fights for possession during last night's Carling Cup second round match against Reading at the Madejski Stadium