

On the spot!

BRISTOL ROV 1 HATTERS 1 (Luton win 5-3 on penalties)

Andy Mackenzie at the Memorial Stadium

LUTON squeezed into the second round of the Carling Cup after a penalty shootout against League Two side Bristol Rovers last night.

Adam Boyd's first Hatters goal had been cancelled out by Richard Walker's second half strike before extra time failed to produce a winner.

Marlon Beresford saved from Andy Sandell with three Hatters spot kicks from Brkovic, Vine, and Foley already on the board, then Morgan blasted home off the bar to put Hatters in the driving seat. Sol Davis then stepped up to seal the tie with a nerveless strike.

Hatters started with just five of the players that began Saturday's 2-2 draw with Stoke, meaning first starts of the season for Keith Keane, Dean Morgan, Ahmet Brkovic, David Bell, Stephen O'Leary and Adam Boyd.

Bristol Rovers, under the guidance of director of football and former Luton boss Lennie Lawrence, included ex-Hatters loanee Sammy Igoe in their side.

Luton began as if undertaking a keep-ball training exercise and it was a prolonged period of passing that saw Town grab the lead just three minutes in.

Holmes, Bell and O'Leary were all involved as, with the hosts chasing shadows, the latter fed the ball into Boyd, who took a touch before crisply firing right-footed from 20 yards into the bottom left-hand corner for his first Hatters goal.

After Leon Barnett was forced to clear a dangerous Rovers header across goal in the sixth minute, Morgan was next to try his luck for Luton five minutes later as he picked up the ball in his own half and ended a weaving run with a shot at home keeper Steve Phillips from the edge of the area.

Town were still looking to play the ball whenever possible and another slick move almost led to number two in the 20th minute. Coyne started the attack with a raking pass to Bell who neatly brought the ball down and found Morgan, who in turn fed Boyd to curl just past the right-hand post from 22 yards.

The Pirates proved they had a forward threat of their own just seconds later, however, as Igoe played in skipper Craig Disley on a burst upfield and the midfielder saw his angled 15-yard strike deflect off both O'Leary and the hand of Marlon Beresford before hitting the outside of the post and rebounding behind.



Referee: Jarnail Singh (Middlesex)
Attendance: 2,882

Igoe then teed up Lewis Haldane to cut in from the right for a 25-yard strike at Beresford in the 26th minute.

And after Morgan saw an effort disallowed for offside just before the half-hour mark, Haldane then cut in from the left only to see his dangerous cross-shot cleared by Coyne at full stretch.

Haldane sparked panic again minutes before the break as he outstripped Barnett on to a long ball, but chose to cut back looking for options rather than close in on goal.

Centre-half Barnett, who went into the game in the unlikely position of Town's leading scorer, headed Morgan's free-kick over in the 55th minute.

But it was the hosts who were beginning to control possession and they found the equaliser just after the hour.

Danger man Haldane held off Barnett as he collected on the bye-line and pulled back for strike partner Walker to beat O'Leary to the ball and slide home low to Beresford's right from 15 yards.

Hatters brought on Carlos Edwards and Rowan Vine for Holmes and Boyd in the 65th minutes as they tried to force the issue. Yet it was Rovers who next went close seven minutes later when Stuart Campbell cut in from the left and fired just over the bar from 24 yards.

Brkovic should have sealed victory in the dying minutes of normal time when an Edwards cross was flicked on by Morgan, but his shot from six yards hit the bar.



POWERHOUSE: David Bell covered a lot of ground as Hatters laboured to dispose of cup opponents Bristol Rovers

Picture by Gareth Owen