

Blackwell stops the rot as Luton give a glimmer of hope that relegation can still be avoided

Kevin's shot-shy Hatters take share of the spoils

LUTON TOWN FC

THE CHAMPIONSHIP
BURNLEY 0

LUTON 0

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KEVIN BLACKWELL'S reign as manager of Luton Town didn't get off to the dream start Hatters fans would have hoped for but an organised performance did prevent a seventh successive defeat.

The point wasn't enough to keep Luton off the bottom of the Championship table yet there are signs for real optimism as new boss Blackwell's team looked a much meaner outfit than in recent months.

The clash between the division's out-of-form sides - Luton had not won away from home in six months and Burnley hadn't won a game since November 28 - was never going to be a classic but Hatters looked the better team which pleased Blackwell.

"I know they're struggling at the moment but it's a tough place to come," he said. "We had chances that were more than half chances and on any other day might have gone in."

"I'm delighted with the attitude of the players. The application and determination was there for all to see. If we keep doing that then it's all I can ask."

"It's nice when you hear the home fans getting on the players' backs. As an away manager you know that fear is creeping in and it gives your players confidence."

"The target is to have one more point or one more goal than the side third from bottom. I didn't come here



Keith Keane battles for possession at Turf Moor with Burnley's Ade Akinbiyi

on the strength of seven games. There was no point in coming to Luton if they were just going to stay at Kenilworth Road. This club's got a lot going for it. In a new stadium we could easily attract 15-20,000. The plan showed to me by the board of directors excites me."

When he was unveiled as Hatters boss on Tuesday Blackwell spoke of his new squad's need to adapt to different formations than that of the traditional 4-4-2 so favoured by his predecessor Mike Newell. Against

Burnley Blackwell went for a 4-1-4-1 and made four changes from the side beaten by Ipswich a fortnight ago.

Markus Heikkinen sat in front of the defence and Drew Talbot was asked to play a lone role up front. Inspiration it seemed would come from David Bell and Dean Morgan down the wings.

But Blackwell's new system was dealt a crippling blow 20 minutes in when Leon Barnett limped off with a torn hamstring. The centre back came off second best in a clash with

Burnley's Steve Jones and Chris Coyne came on to partner Clarke Carlisle in the heart of defence.

The home side tested the new defensive pairing minutes later when Paul McVeigh's free kick was headed goalwards by Andy Gray from eight yards. But Dean Brill - recalled in place of former Burnley favourite Marlon Beresford - watched it all the way and saved the game's first effort on target with relative ease.

Gray wasted the only other opportunity of the half on 33 minutes when

his weak shot from livewire Steve Jones' centred ball was comfortably gathered by Brill.

After the restart Luton's patient approach quietened the home support and carved out their first chance on 58 minutes. Despite being trapped in the corner Matt Spring deceived his markers and delivered a tantalising cross into the box. Dean Morgan beat Claret's captain Steven Caldwell to the ball but skied his header over Brian Jensen's goal.

On 66 minutes Spring tested Jensen after a slick passing move put the midfielder through. But Spring's side-foot shot from just inside the area lacked the pace to really trouble the Danish 'keeper.

With the game swinging in Luton's favour Burnley made a double substitution and Blackwell responded. Off came Morgan for fit again striker Calvin Andrew and a clearly tired Sol Davis made way for Kevin Foley. Making his first appearance of an injury ravaged season, Andrew nearly had an instant impact when he pounced on some hesitant Burnley defending. His pace took him clear but he was fouled on the edge of the box. The resulting freekick was well rehearsed but Spring's eventual shot smashed against the wall.

Both teams threw men forward in the later stages but in truth neither side seemed likely to score. One plus for Luton was Andrew, who looked a handful for the Burnley defence the moment he came on. At the final whistle the point was far better received by the travelling Luton fans who can look to the final six games with renewed optimism while the Turf Moor crowd boomed their side off. **Luton: Brill; Keane, Carlisle, Barnett (Coyne 24m), Davis (Foley 70m); Heikkinen; Spring, Robinson, Bell; Morgan (Andrew 70m); Talbot Subs: Beresford, Brkovic**