

Furlong gets his fourth of the campaign but Hatters fail to hold their nerve in the dying minutes

Set-piece mayhem as Rovers nick it

07/08

LUTON TOWN FC

LEAGUE ONE
TRANMERE ROVERS 2
Curran 74, Kay 86
LUTON TOWN 1
Furlong 6

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IS there no cure for Luton's away day blues?

A goal up through Paul Furlong's header, Hatters held on to the lead until six minutes from time when Tranmere substitutes Craig Curran and Antony Kay helped Luton snatch defeat from the jaws of victory yet again.

It is now three defeats from the first three away games to go with the 15 they suffered in last season's relegation campaign.

It had all started so well for Kevin Blackwell's men as a change to 4-5-1 stifled Tranmere and lone striker Furlong grabbed his fourth of the season early on in a first half that Hatters controlled.

But as the Friday night game drew to a close Luton shot themselves in the foot, first through Chris Coyne's accidental assist for Rovers' forward Curran and then when Blackwell introduced Jaroslav Fojut into the play.

No slight against the on-loan Bolton Wanderers defender, but when he replaced Steve Robinson, Hatters looked out of sorts. With three centre halves on the pitch Luton were still trying to figure out their shape when Tranmere struck through Kay's looped header.

After another loss on the road manager Blackwell blamed Rovers' equaliser on the referee who forced Richard Jackson to go off the pitch – moments before Curran struck – due to a head injury.

"If you say things about refs these days you get done so I'll be careful," said Blackwell.

"It's hard enough to win games without officials drawing up stupid rules. The game's gone too soft – it's a nanny state. There wasn't much blood.

"We're just not getting the breaks. We had chances to finish the game off. We've got to look at ourselves – we worked hard but got nothing for it."

Clearly aggrieved at the suggestion the Fojut substitution handed Rovers the win Blackwell said: "There was no confusion, it was a set piece and we knew what we were doing. The ball travelled 70 yards and he's looped a header in – it could have gone anywhere.

"If you've got to win 1-0 you've got to win 1-0. We'll learn from this and improve."



Paul Furlong in action at Tranmere on Friday night. Furlong put Hatters into the lead for the majority of the game but Hatters slumped to their third straight away defeat with two late goals

As strange as it sounds there were some positives to come from a third straight away loss as for 45 minutes Hatters turned in a near perfect performance for a visiting side.

There were two changes from last weekend with Dave Edwards back from international duty replacing Darren Currie, while striker Drew Talbot was sacrificed for Dean Morgan making up a five-man midfield.

From the off Luton looked well drilled and threatening on the counter-attack. Six minutes in and hard-working Matt Spring cut inside two defenders before crossing for Furlong.

The veteran's header was tipped on to the crossbar from Danny Coyne but he wasn't to be denied. From David Bell's subsequent corner Furlong ghosted in at the far post and nodded the ball in between Coyne and the woodwork.

Robinson's perfectly executed volley from the edge of the box looked goalbound on 11 minutes but it was well read by Rovers' goalkeeper Coyne who gathered comfortably.

Moments later Edwards should have done better than to head straight at Coyne from a good posi-

tion as Luton silenced the locals with a dominant display.

Half an hour in and from ex-Hatter Paul McLaren's free kick, Luton had Alan Goodall to thank for preserving their goal advantage before half time.

Shane Sherriff, up for the set piece was left alone at far post and his free header went past David Forde but not the recovering Goodall who headed off the line.

The second half bought out the best in Tranmere and the worst in Luton. From looking like they could add a much-needed second, Hatters had to hang on as Rovers missed a host of chances.

Chief protagonist was Steve Davies who showed why Leeds and Sheffield Wednesday among others tried to prise him away from Prenton Park on transfer deadline day when he burst down the right, delivering a cross-cum-shot that bounced off the top of the bar.

On the hour mark Ben Chorley, then Gareth Taylor fluffed their lines from close range before Chris Greenacre somehow shot wide when it was easier to score on 71 minutes. Davies' ball cut right

through the defence and reached Greenacre with just Forde to beat.

The forward's deft touch went inches wide from six yards.

Tranmere's eventual leveller came from a more direct route on 84 minutes. Ex-MK Dons midfielder Chorley played a long ball into the box, and Coyne jumped with Greenacre but inadvertently headed into the path of Curran who because of the Luton defender's touch wasn't off-side. The teenage striker slammed his shot past Forde from close range.

Seconds later midfielder Robinson was swapped for rookie Fojut's league debut and it seemed Luton would switch to a 5-4-1. But when the Pole came on it seemed unclear where he would fit in and as Davies launched a deep free kick into the box, Hatters' marking was non-existent, although that shouldn't take anything away from Kay's precise header that left Forde stranded.

For the final minutes Fojut was even moved up front as Luton looked to get out of jail. They almost did as Spring went close with long range effort that had to be palmed away by Coyne.

stats corner

MAN OF THE MATCH



Matt Spring

Box to box performance was much more like the Spring of old.

THE SQUAD

Forde; Jackson, Perry, Coyne, Goodall; Bell (Brkovic 77m), Robinson (Fojut 85m), Spring, Edwards, Morgan (Peschisolido 90m); Furlong. Subs: McVeigh, Currie.

MATCH FACTS

CORNERS

TRANMERE 7 LUTON 3

OFFSIDE

TRANMERE 1 LUTON 1

SHOTS ON TARGET

TRANMERE 8 LUTON 6

SHOTS OFF TARGET

TRANMERE 5 LUTON 9

BOOKINGS

TRANMERE 0

LUTON 1

Bell '76'

REFEREE

TONY BATES (STAFFORDSHIRE)

ATTENDANCE

6525

FOOTBALL LEAGUE ONE

Bournemouth	1	North'ton	1
Gillingham	1	Brighton	0
Hartlepool	1	Swindon	1
Huddersfield	2	Chelt'ham	3
Millwall	1	Walsall	2
Oldham	0	Southend	1
Port Vale	0	Nottm Forest	2
Yeovil	0	Leyton O	1

Played on Friday

Bristol Rovers	0	Leeds	3
Swansea	2	Carlisle	1
Tranmere	2	Luton	1

FOOTBALL LEAGUE ONE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leyton O	6	5	1	0	9	3	16
Tranmere	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Hartlepool	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Carlisle	6	3	1	2	6	4	10
Yeovil	6	3	1	2	5	4	10
Brighton	6	3	0	3	9	8	9
Southend	6	3	0	3	9	9	9
Bristol Rvrs	6	2	3	1	7	8	9
Huddersf'd	6	3	0	3	6	8	9
Crewe	5	2	2	1	6	5	8
Swansea	5	2	1	2	7	6	7
Swindon	6	1	4	1	6	6	7
Cheltenham	5	2	1	2	5	5	7
Notts Forest	5	1	3	1	5	4	6
Northampton	6	1	3	2	8	8	6
Luton	6	2	0	4	8	9	6
Gillingham	6	2	0	4	4	10	6
B'mouth	6	1	2	3	3	5	5
Walsall	6	1	2	3	5	8	5
Port Vale	6	1	2	3	2	6	5
Doncaster	5	1	1	3	4	7	4
Millwall	6	1	1	4	3	8	4
Leeds	6	6	0	0	14	3	3
Oldham	5	1	0	4	3	8	3