

Hatters sick to the Gills at late winner

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by Alec Swann

RELEGATION to League Two appears to be a certainty for Luton following a 2-1 defeat to Gillingham at the Priestfield Stadium last night.

Despite leading through Sam Parkin's first half header, a brace from Simeon Jackson gave the home side what, on the balance of play and especially after the break, was a deserved victory.

However, it was the visitors who started the brighter, showing a willingness to spread the ball wide, but their initial chances came to nothing due to a poor final ball.

With both sides scrapping against relegation, the tension was reflected in the lack of fluency on show.

The hosts' tactics were limited to banging the ball forward to their strike partnership of Jackson and Dennis Oli, and it was the latter who had the first real chance, but his shot from 18 yards was straight at Dean Brill.

A Matthew Spring corner threatened shortly after, before Oli fired another effort into the arms of Brill.

As Gillingham settled they began to assume the ascendancy, but that all changed in the 17th minute when a slick move saw the ball spread to Ed Asafu Adjaye and, from his cross, Parkin looped the ball over Derek Stillie and into the net.

The goal may have been slightly against the run of play, but Luton's lead was far from unwarranted.

A desperate lunge from Paul McVeigh then denied John Nutter and seconds later Parkin squandered a free header, after Asafu-Adjaye's superb cross had found him unmarked eight yards out.

A misjudgement by Brill on 25 minutes almost proved costly, but Garry Richards contrived to fire well over with the goal at his mercy.

Brill then redeemed himself with a smart save to his left to deny Oli as the hosts began to up the tempo.

However, when Luton put their foot on the ball their passing was better than that of Gillingham, whose



ENERGETIC: Young striker Ryan Charles was unable to inspire Hatters to victory at Gillingham last night

Gillingham 2 Luton 1

distribution, with Richards the main culprit, erratic at best.

Parkin could have done better 10 minutes before the break, but he could only direct McVeigh's cross weakly at Stillie, while Brill once again foiled Oli, who appeared to be taking on Luton all by himself.

A neat one-two between Parkin and Spring then saw the midfielder drag his shot wide and, as the break

approached, the visitors were forced to scramble a threatening free-kick clear.

The home side, with Adam Miller pushed into an more advanced role from the midfield berth he occupied in the first half, came out strongly in the second period with Mark Bentley's header looping on to the roof of Brill's net early.

Luton were finding it difficult to get out of their own half as Gillingham continued to pour forward, and Brill produced a remarkable save to deny Jackson when an equaliser looked inevitable.

Ryan Charles' snap-shot went harmlessly wide amid the one-way traffic, while Spring opted to go for goal from a wide free-kick before Jackson saw another golden chance go begging on the hour when Keith Keane had to clear off the line with Brill beaten.

A succession of attacks were repelled by Luton's makeshift back four, with both Keane and Don Hutchison earning their money, as the Priestfield faithful became increasingly restless.

STAR HATTER Dean Brill. Didn't deserve to lose.

GILLINGHAM



Unused subs: Kiely, Fuller

LUTON TOWN



Unused subs: Robinson, Beavan, Goodall, Currie

Referee: Paul Melin (Surrey)

Attendance: 6,142

On 70 minutes, a quick break almost resulted in Parkin adding a second, but after neatly creating space his left footed shot went narrowly wide of the mark.

With 16 minutes left on the clock Gillingham levelled.

Brill did well to save from Jackson, but the ensuing scramble enabled the former Rushden man to finally find the target with a close range header.

There only looked like being one winner from there, but desperation does nothing for poise, with both sides struggling to show any composure.

Unfortunately for Luton, all their hard work was undone with three minutes left when Southall's deep centre was headed home by Jackson at the far post.

It was tough on Mick Harford's side, who had battled away valiantly, and the result sends the Hatters one step closer to the inevitable drop.