

Hungry Hatters fight for it

MANAGER MICK HARFORD PRAISES HIS PLAYERS AS THEY THROW THEIR HEART AND SOUL INTO THE QUEST FOR LEAGUE TWO SAFETY

LUTON TOWN FC

LEAGUE TWO

GILLINGHAM 0

LUTON TOWN 1

Parkin '3'

TOM LEECH
at the Priestfield Stadium

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MINUS 27 and counting...

The Hatters recorded their first win of the season with a gutsy display that at last made a dent on their points deduction.

Sam Parkin's early header settled a nervy encounter that may not have been pretty to watch, but showed this Luton side are willing to put themselves on the line to defy the odds and stay up – literally.

Four times in the second half Hatters cleared the ball off the goal line by whatever means necessary to preserve their lead and start the epic climb to League Two safety.

Manager Mick Harford made one change from the side that pulled off the result of the first round of the Carling Cup on Tuesday night. Keith Keane came in for Lewis Emanuel, who went off injured in the 2-0 win against Championship side Plymouth Argyle.

The large away following were rewarded for their journey to Kent just three minutes in when Hatters took the lead with the first attack of the game.

A slick move began on the halfway line between Rossi Jarvis and Parkin which set Chris Martin free down the left. The on-loan Norwich City man held the ball up long enough for his strike partner to dash into the box and get on the end of a weighted cross. Parkin's precise header into the bottom corner of Alan Julian's goal oozed the confidence of a striker who is hitting form after an injury blighted spell at the club.

The goal rocked Gillingham who weren't allowed any breathing space by the hungry Hatters. No player in a blue shirt got more than two touches on the ball before he was closed down or tackled by a Luton player. Such eagerness was not appreciated by referee Steve Tanner who dished out three undeserved yellow cards in the first half.

When Gillingham did settle they twice came close to levelling. In Simeon Jackson and Mark McCammon they have the tried and tested little and large up front that gave Luton's defence cause for concern.

Half an hour in Tyrone Berry dribbled into the box and got five yards from goal before Jackson took the ball off his toes. The Gills' diminutive forward aimed for Dean Brill's near post, but the Hatters keeper was down quickly to block. With five minutes until the interval a Barry Fuller cross into the box was allowed to sail



COMMITMENT: Sub Kevin Watson throws himself into this block in the final minutes at Gillingham, inset, Harford is happy

over the back line for man-mountain McCammon's header which left Brill stranded and counting his blessings it was narrowly off target.

Along with Luton, Gillingham were also relegated from League One last season but are aiming to go back up at the first attempt. The bookies have the Gills as strong contenders for promotion and they came out recharged after the break.

But they were met by a stubborn Luton led by the effervescent Kevin Nicholls and the impressive Michael Spillane. Yet it was Sol Davis who came to the rescue on 53 minutes when McCammon's far post header from a free kick was booted off the line by the Luton left back.

Gillingham huffed and puffed but the Hatters were not going to give up the lead without a fight. That spirit was typified on 70 minutes when the home side had three successive efforts stopped on the goal line. In a goalmouth scramble Luton players were throwing their bodies at a McCammon header, an Andrew Crofts drive and a Jackson snap shot. There was simply no way

past a sea of white shirts.

As the referee's assistant signalled four minutes' added time, Hatters looked drained and it appeared ominous when Claude Gnackpa was incor-

rectly penalised and Gillingham were awarded a free kick. Gills packed the box – even keeper Julian went up – but just as they had all afternoon Luton nullified the threat and held on.

The stats

FOOTBALL LEAGUE ONE

Saturday

Aldershot	1	Bournem'th	1
Brentford	4	Grimsby	0
Chester	0	Wycombe	2
Chesterfield	1	Bury	3
Exeter	0	Shrewsbury	1
Gillingham	0	Luton	1
Lincoln City	1	Dag & Red	3
Macclesfield	0	Bradford	2
Morecambe	1	Rotherham	3
Notts County	0	Darlington	0
Port Vale	0	A'ton Stanley	2
Rochdale	3	Barnet	1

THE SQUAD

Luton: Brill; Gnackpa, Pilkington, Spillane, Davis; Keane (Watson '58'), Nicholls, Hall, Jarvis; Martin (Plummer '90'), Parkin. Subs: Jackson, Roper, McVeigh.

LEAGUE TWO TABLE

TEAM	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1 DAG & RED	2	1	0	0	6	0	1	0	0	3	1	8	6
2 SHREWSBURY	2	1	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	1	0	5	6
3 BRADFORD	2	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	3	6
4 BURY	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	1	3	6
5 ROCSDALE	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	4
6 WYCOMBE	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	4
7 ALDERSHOT	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	4
8 BRENTFORD	2	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	3
9 ACC'TON ST.	2	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	3
10 CHESTERFIELD	2	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	3	1	0	3
11 PORT VALE	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	3
12 DARLINGTON	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
13 EXETER	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	-1	1
14 GILLINGHAM	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	-1	1
15 NOTTS COUNTY	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	-1	1
16 MORECAMBE	2	0	0	1	1	3	0	1	0	1	1	-2	1
17 GRIMSBY	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	-4	1
18 LINCOLN CITY	2	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	1	0	1	-3	0
19 BARNET	2	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	1	1	3	-4	0
20 MACCLESFIELD	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	4	-6	0
21 CHESTER	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	6	-8	0
22 ROTHERHAM	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	1	3	-11
23 B'MOUTH	2	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	-15
24 LUTON	2	0	0	1	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	-1	-27

Post match...

THE first game of 2008 at Port Vale was the last time Hatters had won away from Kenilworth Road so Mick Harford was understandably boosted by yesterday's win.

"No-one can question the desire of the players to play for this football club. It's a long road but this could be the first building block," said the Luton boss.

"I think Gillingham will be one of the teams at the top of this division so it makes this win even more impressive.

"The work rate, commitment and passion displayed by the players was there for all to see. In defence we were fantastic and we deserved to win.

"It's a massive win. It's the first time Luton Town have won away in a long time and I couldn't have asked for any more from my team."

Sam Parkin made it two goals in two games and Harford was quick to praise the hitman.

"It was a great goal. Sam's made a career of headed goals at the far post and long may it continue."

Gillingham boss Mark Stimson was even more glowing of Parkin.

"There's no way he should be playing at this level of football," he said.

"Parkin will get 25-30 goals in this division. Other clubs were looking at him but he's stayed at Luton and if it wasn't for their 30 point deduction they'd easily make the play offs."

For Harford it was a case of looking to the next game as he attempts to add to his squad.

He said: "Today proved to me that we can come away and scrap it out. It'll bode well for the future.

"The transfer window closes at the end of August and I'll be looking to bring two or three in on loan."

MAN OF THE MATCH



Micheal Spillane

The on-loan Norwich defender was a tower of strength at the back

MATCH FACTS

SHOTS ON TARGET

GILLINGHAM 6 LUTON 2

SHOTS OFF TARGET

GILLINGHAM 6 LUTON 6

BOOKINGS

GILLINGHAM: Jackson '53'
LUTON: Davis '9', Parkin '17', Gnackpa '26'

REFEREE: Steve Tanner, Somerset

ATTENDANCE: 5,339