

C'est magnifique as Hatters scrap to win

Gillingham 0 Luton Town 1

CLASSY Frenchman Claude Gnaka declared that brave Luton deserved victory for their heroic defensive performance at Priestfield on Saturday, writes Mark Wood.

And the former Racing de Santander defender, who believes Town have the ability to battle their way out of the relegation zone and survive despite their 30-point penalty, was buoyed after the Hatters recorded their first league win of the season thanks to Sam Parkin's fine third minute header.

He said: "We defended very, very well today I think. We scored a goal soon and I think we deserved victory."

"It was difficult because the pitch was very slow so we couldn't play football like we played against Plymouth. We like playing football. It was difficult because we couldn't keep the ball and pass it."

"We have good communication in the team. We are all concentrating on what we have to do."

"I'm very confident we will stay up. We are good players, that's why we are here. The most important thing is to win games and you never know what can happen."

On his move to Kenilworth Road, Gnaka, 25, said: "I'm very happy to be here in Luton. It's a big, big, club. It's a Championship side I think - they won the cup. My first game at Kenilworth Road was a big occasion to see all the fans."

"It was difficult to build the team because a lot of players came on trial late. But now we have the team together and now we have to play more together and keep winning games."

"Mick, the gaffer, showed me a lot of interest. He told me to come because he likes playing football. I like playing football and played in Spain before. That's what they want to bring here in Luton."

And he also revealed just how important captain Kevin Nicholls is to the rest of the team.

He said: "The most important thing is the captain Nico. Nico is the spirit



DETERMINED: New signing Claude Gnaka has looked an excellent capture in the first few games of the season

of the team. When you are on the pitch he brings the team up."

Gnaka, who can also play at centre-half, put in another tenacious performance at full-back and enjoyed the opportunity to run beyond the returning Keith Keane, who started on the right of midfield.

He added: "Keith is a good defender so when I move forward Keith can stay behind me and defend, so he was a good option for the team."

"I prefer right-back because I like to get forward and cross the ball."

Luton got off to the ideal start when Ross Jarvis' through ball was deflected into the path of Chris Martin who chipped delightfully to the far post for Parkin to power his header home.

Gillingham enjoyed the better of

the game throughout and some sloppy defending almost allowed the hosts to level on 22 minutes. Town failed to react to Mark McCammon's flick on, but Simeon Jackson could only fire over from the edge of the area.

The Gills twice went close before the break. On 40 minutes, the lively Tyrone Berry evaded Martin and a lunging Sol Davis on the left before bursting into the area and squaring for Jackson, but Dean Brill was alert to save with his legs.

And McCammon was inches away three minutes later when his clever flicked looped just wide with a stranded Brill well beaten.

Town had to be at their scrambling and scrapping best in the second half to deny the Gills an equaliser.

Davis cleared McCammon's header

off the line on 54 minutes, while Jackson should have probably done better when he lashed over the bar seven minutes later.

And the Hatters somehow survived the mother of all goalmouth scrambles on 71 minutes.

Three times the hosts looked destined to score as they rained in shots from close range, but a combination of some fantastic saves from Brill, coupled with some desperate defending, remarkably kept the ball out.

And seconds later Martin almost took advantage of a defensive mistake when he burst into the box and flashed a shot across the face of goal, but Alan Julian somehow got a telling touch to turn it behind.

With seconds left Hall almost sealed victory when his sizzling effort fizzed over the bar but, despite four minutes of injury time, Town clung on for a hard earned win.

WHAT MICK MADE OF IT

HAPPY Hatters boss Mick Harford hailed his side's rare away victory at Gillingham and admitted he hopes they will scrap to many more.



The delighted Luton manager said the victory was the first building block on Town's road to survival and said 70 more points should see them safe.

He said: "I think it's a massive win for us because it's an away victory. It's a long time since Luton Town won an away game. That's two clean sheets in the last two games which is very important to us."

"It proved to me, the supporters and the players that we can come away and scrap it out and they scrapped it out well today and that augers well for the future. I think Gillingham, after watching them play today, will be one of the teams near the top of the division."

The work rate, effort and commitment the lads showed today, and the desire and passion to do well for the football club, was there for everybody to see. The defending was fantastic. I think we deserved to win just for the way we defended."

On Sam Parkin's fine header that earned the Hatters victory, he said: "Chris Martin crossed a great ball in for Sam and he has done that during his career - scoring at the far post."

Harford said he hadn't had any real problems attracting new players to the club and revealed he hopes to bring in up to three more before the transfer window closes.

He added: "We tell them our plan and how we want to approach things from the board down, about how we want to get ourselves out of trouble and what the plan is for the future."

"It was mirrored out there today with the passion and commitment that they believe they can get themselves out of trouble."

"The window closes at the end of August, but we will have to try to use the loan market to bring players in and move players out."

"We need to bring in two or three more players to bulk the squad out. If we can stay up, these players could be heroes for Luton Town Football Club."

STAR HATTER George Pilkington. Defender reads the game so well.

There's a long way to go: the 2008/09 season in full

AUG	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Sat 9	PORT VALE	1-3	Parkin 35	7,149	24
Tue 12	PLYMOUTH (LGCP)	2-0	Jarvis 15, Plummer 77	2,682	-
Sat 16	Gillingham	1-0	Parkin 3	5,339	24
Sat 23	NOTTS COUNTY				
Tue 26	Reading (LGCP)				
Sat 30	Exeter City				
SEP					
Sat 6	Macclesfield				
Sat 13	ALDERSHOT TN				
Sat 20	Rotherham				
Sat 27	CHESTER CITY				
OCT					
Sat 4	Bradford City				
Sat 11	DARLINGTON				
Sat 18	ACCRINGTON				
Sat 25	Grimsby Town				
Sat 25	Bury				
Tue 28	BOURNEMOUTH				
NOV					
Sat 1	Shrewsbury				
Sat 15	DAGENHAM & RED				
Sat 22	Rochdale				
Tue 25	BRENTFORD				
DEC					
Sat 6	BARNET				
Sat 13	Wycombe				
Sat 20	MORECAMBE				
Fri 26	Chesterfield				

DEC	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Sun 28	LINCOLN CITY				
JAN					
Sat 3	CHESTER CITY				
Sat 10	ROTTERHAM				
Sat 17	Darlington				
Sat 24	BRADFORD CITY				
Tue 27	Bournemouth				
Sat 31	BURY				
FEB					
Tue 3	GRIMSBY TOWN				
Sat 7	Accrington				
Sat 14	Dagenham & Red				
Sat 21	SHREWSBURY				
Sat 28	Port Vale				
MAR					
Tue 3	GILLINGHAM				
Sat 7	EXETER CITY				
Tue 10	Notts County				
Sat 14	Aldershot Town				
Sat 21	MACCLESFIELD				
Sat 28	Morecambe				
APR					
Sat 4	WYCOMBE				
Sat 11	Lincoln City				
Mon 13	CHESTERFIELD				
Sat 18	Barnet				
Sat 25	ROCHDALE				
MAY					
Sat 2	Brentford				

Sam's simply great

HATTERS: Envious Gillingham boss Mark Stimson heaped praise on Hatters' hotshot striker Sam Parkin after seeing him net a fine first half header in Luton's 1-0 victory on Saturday.

He said: "Luton put one ball in our box and possibly the best striker in the division put the ball in the net, which is why he is paid that sort of salary."

"If they didn't have minus 30 points they would definitely be in the play-offs. That boy Parkin shouldn't be at this level. He will get 25 to 30 goals at this level because he is a good player."

Stimson also revealed that he believes the game against Luton will be the toughest his team faces all season. He added: "The crowd and the whole club are fighting for their lives and their defenders did their job properly. I've gone on record this week and said I think this will be our hardest game of the season."