

Collectors' item triggers victory

BACK-IN-FAVOUR DEFENDER HELPS HATTERS TO JUST THEIR SECOND HOME LEAGUE WIN OF THE SEASON

LUTON TOWN FC

FOOTBALL LEAGUE TWO

LUTON TOWN 2

Davis 7, McVeigh 41

DAG'NHAM & R'BRIDGE 1

Okuonghae 33

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LUTON got back to winning ways at home thanks to goals from Sol Davis and Paul McVeigh.

Dogged Dagenham threatened to ruin Hatters' 'must win game' when Magnus Okuonghae took advantage of some slack defending.

But McVeigh's first goal for Luton was enough to chalk up only the second league win at Kenilworth Road this season.

Manager Mick Harford was well aware that with the four teams directly above them playing away this was an ideal time for Hatters to make up ground on their relegation rivals.

The afternoon started according to plan – although the breakthrough came from an unlikely source.

A Davis goal is as rare as rocking horse droppings so it's worth remembering in detail. The sturdy left back had only ever scored twice before yesterday in 200plus appearances and last found the back of the net in March 2005.

Seven minutes in he played a cute one-two with Chris Martin and burst into the box. Daggers goalkeeper Tony Roberts came out to meet him but didn't get close to Davis' side foot shot into the bottom corner.

Out-of-favour under previous manager Kevin Blackwell, Davis is a firm fans' favourite after recovering from a stroke two years ago. His strike sent the crowd into raptures and he was duly mobbed by his teammates.

So far so good as all the early chances fell Luton's way. New boy Kevin Gallen's first sight of goal came 12 minutes in when he managed to break free of some tight defending to squeeze a shot inches wide and a lovely disguised pass from Keith Keane picked out Michael Spillane who from a tight angle couldn't beat Roberts at his near post.

It was Conrad Logan's near post that gave Dagenham an undeserved equaliser on 33 minutes. A driven corner to the upright was flicked up and caught the Luton defence cold. There were three Daggers players ready to pounce although it was Okuonghae who threw a body part at it and the ball was bundled over the line.

Gallen almost had the perfect response when Roberts fluffed his goalkick, clearing straight to the feet of Martin. The on-loan striker knew he didn't have the pace to beat Matt Ritchie tracking back but had the vision and the pass for Gallen.

With just the goalkeeper to beat the veteran went for power and disappointingly blasted straight at Roberts' legs.

The former QPR frontman wasn't the only one guilty of wasting



RARE GEM: Sol Davis opens the scoring on six minutes – his first Hatters goal since 2005

chances – moments later McVeigh scuffed a close range shot after some neat work from Martin had teed him up.

However, he more than made up for it on 41 minutes with a sublime finish to restore Luton's lead. Martin was again provider pulling the Daggers defence apart with his clever running and picked out McVeigh unmarked in the area.

The Ulsterman had time to take it down but only had the volley on his mind as he coolly drilled it past Roberts.

Martin deserved to get his name on the scoresheet and was inches away with a glancing header that would have rightly put a bit of daylight between the Hatters and their visitors at the break.

Instead Dagenham felt they were denied a clear penalty in the last action of the half. A long ball was punted high over Luton's back line and Claude Gnakpa and Ben Strevens appeared to fall over each other.

Stevens was furious when the referee awarded a free kick on the edge of the box instead of the spot kick. It looked a weak call as whatever contact was made definitely happened inside the penalty area. After some delay Sam Saunders took the set piece and ensured Luton went in ahead at half time.

What this Dagenham team lacked in terms of skill they more than made up for in determination in the second half. While never actually

creating any clearcut chances they had enough about them to unsettle the Hatters who looked nervous in possession. The second half turned into a scrap as the Daggers tried to bully their way back into the game but Luton stayed solid – especially Logan who had to deal with the aerial bombardment.

The goalkeeper's best save of the match came with ten minutes to go when he rose above the packed penalty area to punch away Saunders' deep cross then back-

tracked and leapt to catch Strevens' lob.

With the three points so vital it was no surprise to see the Luton players run down the game in the corner flag.

The tension wasn't helped by a late effort from Saunders that flashed past the post and an agonisingly long injury time. The relief in Kenilworth Road at the final whistle was clear and the majority of the crowd stayed to cheer Harford's men off the pitch.

Post match...

GOAL hero Sol Davis insists Luton Town will not be playing Conference football next season.

"I've had more than my fair share of lows – both professionally and personally. I won't be getting relegated again," he said.

On his rare strike the defender said: "I picked up the ball on the wing, saw Chris who picked out my run and thankfully my shot went in. I don't often get the chance to score so it was nice.

"The music's on – the lads are dancing about! It's a good feeling.

"We've been hit and miss so far this season but we're getting players back from injury. You get down when you get beat and you see the minus points on the table but we know we're getting there. We believe we can do it and stay in the league."

His manager was equally as buoyant about Hatters' chances of survival. Mick Harford said: "It was a 'must win game' in terms of our recent home form. Dagenham are a hard-working team and they made it difficult for us.

"I thought the scoreline flattered them a bit at half time. I was pleased with the football we played.

"It's a good three points and I'm delighted for the players. The fans were behind us today and we deserved our victory. It was a good team effort against a decent side.

"You look at the bench and we now have cover. I know 100 per cent that players like Garreth O'Connor and Wayne Andrews who were not in the 16 today are available to call on at any time."

On new signing Kevin Gallen who joined on a month's loan from MK Dons Harford said: "I thought Kevin did well. He could have scored a couple of goals. Kevin's got the brains to find that little bit of space to create chances for himself and others."

The man himself told of his reasons on joining the Kenilworth Road club.

"I was told at MK that the manager wouldn't be playing me," said the 33-year-old. "Mick's given me the chance to play football and help the club out.

"It reminds me of QPR when we were in administration. Every game feels like a cup final, the crowd are behind you and that's what tempted me here."

The stats

FOOTBALL LEAGUE TWO

Friday

Chesterfield 2 Shrewsbury 2

Yesterday

Acc'ton Stanley 3 B'mouth 0

Aldershot 1 Exeter 0

Barnet 0 Notts County 4

Bury 0 Grimsby 2

Chester 1 Morecambe 2

Darlington 2 Lincoln City 0

Gillingham L Rotherham L

Luton 2 Dag & Red 1

Port Vale 0 Brentford 3

Rochdale 1 Macclesfield 1

Wycombe 1 Bradford 0

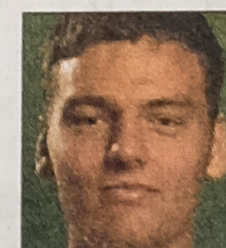
THE SQUAD

Logan; Gnakpa, Roper, Spillane, Davis (Jarvis 75); McVeigh, Nicholls (Hall '84'), Keane, Howells; Gallen, Martin. Subs: Brill, Worley, Talbot.

LEAGUE TWO TABLE

		HOME						I AWAY							
	TEAM	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS	
1	DARLINGTON	16	5	2	1	15	6	4	2	2	14	8	15	31	
2	WYCOMBE	15	4	3	0	9	4	4	4	0	7	2	10	31	
3	SHREWSBURY	16	6	1	1	24	5	1	5	2	9	10	18	27	
4	ROCHDALE	16	4	2	2	16	9	3	4	1	11	9	9	27	
5	BRENTFORD	16	4	3	1	13	6	3	3	2	7	6	8	27	
6	BRADFORD	16	4	3	1	16	11	4	0	4	13	11	7	27	
7	GILLINGHAM	16	6	1	1	18	3	2	2	4	7	18	4	27	
8	EXETER	16	3	2	3	10	11	5	1	2	12	8	3	27	
9	BURY	16	3	1	4	8	9	4	3	1	14	9	4	25	
10	DAG & RED	16	4	3	1	18	5	3	0	5	11	13	11	24	
11	CHESTERFIELD	16	3	2	3	13	10	3	2	3	15	13	5	22	
12	LINCOLN CITY	16	3	3	2	11	8	3	1	4	7	9	1	22	
13	ALDERSHOT	16	5	3	0	14	9	1	0	7	7	20	-8	21	
14	PORT VALE	16	2	0	6	8	18	4	1	3	10	8	-8	19	
15	NOTTS COUNTY	16	1	5	2	8	9	2	4	2	14	12	1	18	
16	ACTON ST'LEY	16	3	1	4	11	10	2	2	4	7	10	-2	18	
17	MORECAMBE	16	2	4	2	10	10	1	3	4	8	16	-8	16	
18	MACCLESFIELD	15	2	0	6	9	20	2	2	3	7	10	-14	14	
19	CHESTER	16	2	2	4	12	11	1	2	5	7	22	-14	13	
20	BARNET	16	1	2	5	6	14	2	2	4	12	20	-16	13	
21	ROTHERHAM	16	4	2	2	14	9	3	3	2	8	9	4	9	
22	GRIMSBY	16	0	3	5	6	13	1	3	4	5	17	-19	9	
23	BOUR'MOUTH	15	2	3	3	7	7	1	2	4	8	16	-8	-3	
24	LUTON	15	2	2	3	10	11	3	2	3	8	10	-3	-11	

MAN OF THE MATCH



CHRIS MARTIN

The striker's build-up play created chance after chance

MATCH FACTS

SHOTS ON TARGET:

LUTON 6 DAG & R'BRIDGE 8

SHOTS OFF TARGET:

LUTON 6 DAG & R'BRIDGE 3

BOOKINGS:

LUTON: NICHOLLS, 59.

DAG & R'BRIDGE GAIN 59, STREVS 88, UDDIN 88.

REFEREE: MICHAEL JONES (CHESHIRE)

ATTENDANCE: 5,402