

Logan saves the day for Hatters

by Alec Swann

LUTON Town advanced to the second round of the FA Cup after a dramatic penalty shoot-out victory at Moss Lane against Altrincham.

Paul McVeigh netted the match-winning spot-kick to get a relieved Hatters side out of jail and into the next round of the cup.

The Blue Square Premier outfit gave as good as they got throughout the encounter, so much so that, at times, you would have been hard-pressed to distinguish the full-timers from the semi-pros.

Admittedly Luton did play with 10 men for the best part of an hour following Sol Davis' dismissal but they created precious few chances in front of goal and were hanging on for the majority of the added period.

After a 35-minute delay due to a floodlight failure and subsequent search for a new fuse, both sides had half chances in the early stages but both came to nothing.

Chris Martin headed harmlessly over in the seventh minute from a deflected McVeigh cross and minutes later Conrad Logan reacted swiftly to deny Colin Little on the edge of the area. There was plenty of commitment on either side but both were lacking guile, with the aerial ball preferred far too often.

With Asa Hall replacing Kevin Gallen up front, the visitors lacked any kind of physical presence and too often squandered possession.

Altrincham looked dangerous on the break which did not allow the Hatters to gain any kind of foothold in the contest until midway through the half when they should have gone in front.

A well-directed cross from Jake Howells found McVeigh whose header across goal reached Martin. Unfortunately for the Hatters, Martin proceeded to miss an open goal, his header going straight to McVeigh who could only kick thin air with the



Picture by Gareth Owen

Altrincham 0 Luton Town 0, aet (Luton win 4-2 on penalties)

target gaping.

Claude Gnaka then brushed Warren Peyton aside at the far post from a good Little centre as the hosts, who were adding a decent contribution to proceedings, refused to be overrun.

As the half drew to a close, McVeigh had a deflected effort find the arms of Ralph, while the last significant action of the half saw Martin, faced with a clear run on goal, have his shot well intercepted by the sliding Mark McGregor.

The second half started at an increased tempo with chances at

either end. Gnaka made space before firing a left-footed effort which was saved by Ralph and Hall hit an effort well over the target.

The hosts, just before the hour mark, gave the Hatters a scare when Robbie Lawton's cross reached Peyton who failed to connect. Davis replaced Howells in a straight swap at left-back and four minutes later Michael Spillane hit the woodwork after meeting Kevin Nicholls' floated free-kick at the far post.

The visitors were beginning to assume the ascendancy, but things turned in Altrincham's favour in the 67th minute when Davis, who had only been on the field for six

minutes, brought down Chris Senior after the midfielder had been sent through on goal.

The referee had no choice but to point to the spot and show Davis a red card, but Logan kept the scores level when he saved Peyton's weakly-struck penalty low to his right. With a one-man advantage, the home side pressed forward as Luton tried to consolidate their position, but they were kept at bay by a scrambling defence and the impressive Logan.

In the 85th minute, Peyton shot straight at Logan and it was the visitors who were on the back foot as extra-time came around.

REAL BATTLE: Keith Keane wins possession for the Hatters last night



Unused subs: Coburn, O'Neill, Owen, Densmore



Unused subs: Brill, Andrews, Worley, Sinclair

Referee: Clive Oliver (Northumberland)

Attendance: 2,397

Altrincham were still on top, but McVeigh almost made Ralph pay for a bad misjudgement in the 94th minute when his header from Nicholls' cross drifted just wide.

A brave block from Hall snuffed out a promising chance for Lee Elam as the Hatters defended doggedly and Drew Talbot, on for Nicholls, hit the side netting a minute after entering the fray.

A threatening cross almost found Peyton in the 106th minute, but the game looked destined, as it had for most of the night, for the lottery of penalties. A brace of corners were tensely repelled and Matt Doughty tried his luck from distance as Luton hung on but, after 210 minutes of football, a shoot-out it was.

Martin, Hall, Gnaka and McVeigh all held their nerve and, despite a miss from Rossi Jarvis, a brace of saves from Logan proved decisive as the Hatters booked a date with Southend United in the next round.

STAR HATTER

Conrad Logan. Excellent all night long for Luton