

Bees sting Town

by Carl Field

A SPIRITED second-half showing could not prevent the Hatters from a narrow defeat against Brentford at Kenilworth Road last night.

Nathan Elder's first-half header secured maximum points for promotion-chasing Bees, while Luton, who had two efforts cleared off the line in the second half, must go again after yet another League Two setback.

Town made three changes to the side that went down 2-0 at Rochdale on Saturday.

Left-sided duo Sol Davis and Jake Howells returned in place of the benched Rossi Jarvis and Garreth O'Connor, while striker Chris Martin's suspension meant that Drew Talbot was handed his first start since March.

Luton boss Mick Harford had made his side fully aware of how important it was to start winning at home and they started brightly, with Davis and Talbot neatly exchanging passes before Howells fired in a dangerous cross on four minutes.

Moments later though, a defensive slip let Charlie MacDonald in on goal and keeper Conrad Logan had to make a decent save to stop Brentford taking an early lead.

On 11 minutes, an attack saw Asa Hall dart into a dangerous position inside the final third and, after pulling the ball back to Howells, the youngster fired a shot that needed Bees stopper Ben Hamer to save low to his right.

Luton were certainly giving a good account of themselves, but they were almost left to rue some sleepy defending on 22 minutes.

MacDonald was left completely unmarked on the right-hand edge of the penalty area and was unlucky to see his shot flash across Logan and just wide of the far post.

But just before the half-hour mark, yet more poor defending by the Hatters was punished as Brentford first time took the lead.

Dean Bowditch cut free down the right and, with Town's marking all at sea, his floated cross into the centre was headed into the net by Elder.

Brentford had a chance to double their advantage two minutes into the second half when Ryan Dickson's free-kick eventually fell kindly for Elder but, fortunately for Luton, the visiting striker was unable to keep



Picture by Joanna Cross

THWARTED: Asa Hall leads another Luton charge on what was once again a frustrating night for the Hatters

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his composure and blazed the ball over the bar from eight yards out.

The visitors continued to impose their football on the hosts and, on 48 minutes, Logan needed to race off his line to stop MacDonald running on to Bowditch's through ball.

Just before the hour mark, a Howells corner was re-directed towards goal by Paul McVeigh and, with keeper Hamer beaten, the goal-bound shot was desperately hacked off the line and away to safety by Karleigh

Osborne.

Seconds later, midfielder Hall thrashed a shot that just cleared the crossbar as, for the first time in the match, Hatters began to dominate possession as they searched for that all-important equaliser.

Davis was then replaced by striker Wayne Andrews as Town switched to three up front.

Luton, though, had their in-form keeper to thank for keeping them in the game on 62 minutes.

Elder's neat flick was laid off by Osborne and into the path of Bowditch, who saw his right-footed

shot turned around the post by a full-stretch Logan.

To their credit, Luton began to bang on the door, and it seemed only a matter of time before their equaliser would come. They were cleared off the line, before Andrews' cross-cum-shot forced a last-ditch save from Hamer.

But Brentford refused to be penned back in their own half and had two glorious chances to give themselves a two-goal cushion in the 70th minute.

First, Logan pulled off a miracu-

STAR HATTER Conrad Logan. Keeper made some crucial saves.

LUTON TOWN



Unused subs: Brill, O'Connor, Beavan

BRENTFORD



Unused subs: Poole, Johnson, Pead, Ademola, Anderson

Referee: Jon Moss (West Yorkshire)

Attendance: 5,248 (527 Brentford)

lous double stop as he saved Dickson's shot before somehow blocking the ricochet that deflected off Elder.

From the very next move, Elder easily shrugged off the challenge of Ian Roper but, despite turning his man, the Brentford hitman smashed the chance high and wide with only Logan to beat.

It began to look as though, it wasn't going to be the Hatters night as moments later, Sam Wood somehow cleared Hall's point-blank header off the line.

Still Town pressed and, on 83 minutes, McVeigh unleashed a 25-yard drive that was destined for the bottom right-hand corner and which had to be diverted behind for a corner by Hamer.

Two minutes later though, captain Keith Keane was shown a straight red card for a cynical challenge on MacDonald, as Brentford launched a dangerous breakaway on the counter.

As he was the last man, the referee had no choice but to send Keane for an early bath. Bowditch then curled the resultant free-kick just inches wide.

Andrews had one last dart into the Brentford box in the final minute of added time but, in the end, Luton were once again left to rue a defensive slip up that ultimately cost them the match.