

Cup hopes sunk by late goals

HATTERS FALL FOUL OF REFEREEING BLUNDERS AGAIN TO MISS OUT ON THE CHANCE OF A MONEY SPINNING TIE

LUTON TOWN FC

FA CUP SECOND ROUND

SOUTHEND 3
Stanislas 34, 84, Walker 90

LUTON TOWN 1
Spillane 80

08/09
(FAC)

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ANOTHER weekend of questionable refereeing sent Hatters crashing out of the FA Cup.

There was no doubting the quality of Southend's Junior Stanislas – on loan from West Ham – whose brace of goals lit up an otherwise predictable encounter that the League One side deserved to win.

But they were helped on their way by linesman Marvin Thompson's controversial decision to flag for a Luton foul before referee Andy Penn awarded Southend a free kick. He kept his arm aloft long after the whistle was blown but the West Midlands official either didn't see or ignored the flag and from the resulting free kick Stanislas gave the Shrimpers the lead.

Michael Spillane's headed goal ten minutes from time levelled things up until Stanislas completed a dream debut with his second before substitute James Walker wrapped things up at the death.

There were two enforced changes from the Luton side that lost to Brentford in midweek. Veteran Kevin Watson took the captain's armband off Keith Keane who was suspended and Rossi Jarvis replaced the cup-tied Kevin Gallen.

A cautious 4-5-1 formation looked justified as the hosts began the brighter. Just two minutes in Alex Revell's fierce shot across Conrad Logan's six-yard box required a strong hand from the Irishman.

The pair resumed their duel 20 minutes later – this time Revell used the element of surprise and went for goal from another tight angle. Logan had to be at his sharpest to parry the powerful shot around the near post.

It was all Southend as the Shrimpers began to create from their superior possession. Half an hour in right back Simon Francis led the charge and crossed into the box for Francis Laurent who had a clear sight of goal. The covering Spillane had to throw his body at the Frenchman's feet to block.

The defender's bravery was forgotten on 32 minutes when Southend went a goal up in strange circumstances. At Rochdale last Saturday Hatters could understandably feel aggrieved by the refereeing but this was unforgivable.

A long ball was put over the top for Kevin Betsty to chase but he was surrounded by Spillane and Ian Roper. The linesman's flag went up straight away to indicate a foul – presumably for pushing from the Southend winger.

Play continued and seconds later it was Betsy who was on the floor as Roper's clumsy challenge sent him tumbling down just outside the box. Rather than consult with his assistant Mr Penn left him with his flag



THE CHASE IS ON: Chris Martin challenges for the ball with Southend's Adam Barrett in the Cup defeat yesterday at Roots Hall

raised while he booked Roper and gave a free kick. Mr Thompson then changed his mind and rather gingerly put his flag down.

Harford and the bench remonstrated to no avail and rookie Stanislas' doubled the punishment with a sublime drive from the set piece which left Logan rooted to the spot.

Revell had another chance to get on the scoresheet before the break but from a Betsy cutback he blazed wide. The best Hatters could muster in the half was lone striker Chris Martin's shot which warmed Steve Mildenhall's gloves but lacked the necessary pace to trouble the Shrimpers' goalkeeper.

Minutes into the restart a knock forced Roper off and George Pilkington came on for his first game since picking up an injury in the home win against Aldershot on September 13.

The return of Pilkington in defence

still couldn't steady the ship as an hour in Johnny Herd's solo run and shot required another fine save from Logan as Hatters were hanging on.

A change was needed and Harford made two. Wayne Andrews and Lewis Emanuel were introduced into the 'action' with Hatters looking devoid of all ideas in attack.

That was until Mr Thompson, perhaps with the image of an angry Harford in his mind, evened things out by ruling Luton's unlikely equaliser had crossed the line.

A corner from Paul McVeigh to the far post dropped to a posse of Hatters players who rose to the cross and headed goalwards. Spillane seemed to have got the important touch and the ball sailed over Mildenhall destined for the bottom corner. Laurent on the line hooked the ball clear but the linesman flagged again – this time to give the goal.

The Shrimpers continued to press

forward and when Francis' deceptive cross-cum-shot looped over the packed penalty area only Logan's fingertips kept the ball out.

There was no-one to blame for Southend's winner as Stanislas made sure of the Essex side's progression to the next round.

Laurent skinned Jake Howells before pulling the ball back from the byeline and picking out the winger unmarked on the penalty spot. With time to pick his spot he headed into the bottom corner of Logan's net giving the Luton stopper no chance.

Southend's afternoon ended with a flourish as they made it three with the move of the match.

Some swift passing down the right hand side cut Luton open and Betsy presented substitute Walker with the easy task of stroking the ball into the net.

He almost made a mess of it with a poor first touch but recovered to drill his shot past Logan.

Post match...

FOR the second Saturday running Mick Harford struggled to bite his tongue over another refereeing performance that cost his side dearly.

The Hatters boss was most angry about a lack of communication after official Andy Penn appeared to miss his colleague Marvin Thompson's flag for Southend's first goal.

"The linesman flagged for a foul on our player but the referee ignored him for whatever reason," said Harford. "Talk about communicating – it was a blatant obstruction of not abiding to the rules."

"I spoke to the fourth official and he told me the linesman had flagged for a foul on a Luton player."

"I'd rather not talk to the referee at this moment. He wouldn't talk to his linesman so he won't talk to me!"

Harford also rued the missed chance of a money-spinning third round tie after another dull away display: "We're obviously disappointed to go out of the FA Cup. We wanted to progress to the third round for various reasons."

"The lads responded well by getting to one-each but we didn't have enough to see the game out."

"I felt we were competing well with them up until the goal."

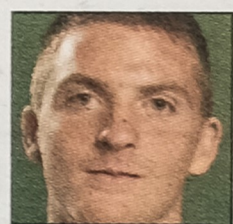
"The manner of their third goal disappointed me more than their first."

Southend manager Steve Tilson had some sympathy with his Luton counterpart but felt the scoreline could have been worse for the Hatters.

"The linesman clearly raised his flag – although what it went up for I don't know," he said. "For whatever reason the linesman and the referee didn't communicate."

"I felt we should have won the game comfortably, but then they equalised and you get a bit nervous. But we should have killed the game well before the end."

MAN OF THE MATCH



MICHAEL SPILLANE

A typically committed performance from the defender

MATCH FACTS

SHOTS ON TARGET:
SOUTHEND 7 LUTON 3

SHOTS OFF TARGET:
SOUTHEND 5 LUTON 2

BOOKINGS:
SOUTHEND:

LUTON: ROPER 34, ANDREWS 76, WATSON 81

REFEREE: ANDY PENN, WEST MIDLANDS

ATTENDANCE: 4,111

SQUAD

Luton: Logan; Gnakpa, Roper (Pilkington 51), Spillane, Davis (Emanuel 71); McVeigh, Watson, Hall, Jarvis (Andrews 77), Howells; Martin. Subs: Brill, Beavan, O'Connor, Sinclair