

'Iconic' Roper heads Hatters to home win

Luton Town 3 Lincoln City 2

'ICONIC' centre-half Ian Roper was hailed by manager Mick Harford as he scored for the second game running as adventurous Luton grabbed a fabulous 3-2 home victory against Lincoln City in a Christmas cracker, writes Mark Wood.

The unassuming centre-back headed home Town's decisive third on Sunday – following up his equaliser deep into injury time at Chesterfield on Friday.

Chris Martin also put in a magical performance against the Imps as he struck twice in a matter of minutes in the first half to put Luton 2-0 up.

Imperious Town turned on the style as they let loose against a Lincoln City side who more than played their part in this festive feast, and although Hatters' stars all put in excellent cameos, it was Roper who once again shone brightest.

Harford said: "He is becoming a bit of an icon. He is not great on the eye, let's be honest, but he knows his job and he has been a pro for long time.

"We knew if we got him fit we would have what I believe is a top centre-half at this level."

But Roper's, 31, played down the adulation, while praising the Luton fans for whom he has become a cult hero. He said: "I don't know about that. I think I'm playing well at the minute and hopefully it can continue. I did have it at Walsall, but the fans have been brilliant and are right behind me now.

"The goals are a bonus, really. It's not really my game scoring goals. I've not scored a great deal in my career."

"We had great service. Rossi Jarvis put in some great balls today and Mickey Spillane put in some great balls. I think it's a bit of a never-say-die attitude we have got now. When we get behind now we believe we can score and get back in it."

And Roper believes people are beginning to see the best of him now he is back to full fitness.

He said: "I think getting some games under my belt helped. I broke



HIGH ADVENTURE: Drew Talbot goes close, right, and Chris Martin is mobbed by Kevin Gallen and Michael Spillane, above

my foot at the end of last season and I hadn't recovered from that properly. "Now I've got a bit of fitness, my form is coming now."

"I think we've got it pretty tight. We are more solid now and playing three up front we are creating more chances."

Attack-minded Luton fielded four strikers in their starting line-up, while Roper found himself with yet another partner at centre-half – young George Beavan – who also attracted praise from Harford.

Roper added: "I think you just have to gel with the players you play with. We've got a good team shape now and people can slot in and out in various positions."

Town made a sluggish start and could have fallen behind after seven minutes when Conrad Logan made a hash of Aaron Brown's cross.

Luton twice went close on 11 minutes, but Roper's header from Jarvis' corner was blocked out and Martin could only fire the rebound into the side netting.

The Imps should have taken the lead on 16 minutes, but Janos Kovacs sent his free header from a free-kick just wide, while Dany N'Gueassan then fired straight at Logan.

A lightning counter attack started



by Kevin Gallen and Jarvis almost saw Luton go ahead on 19 minutes, but Drew Talbot's venomous left-foot drive was well turned over the bar by Rob Burch.

But the Hatters took a well-deserved lead with a scintillating goal on 31 minutes. Keith Keane won the ball in the middle and Gallen showed great awareness to spread the ball wide to the onrushing Michael Spillane, whose inch-perfect cross was headed home by Martin.

Two minutes later it was 2-0 as Martin struck again. Tom Craddock laid the ball into the path of the on-loan Norwich City youngster and Martin drilled home from the edge of the box, despite Burch getting a hand to it.

However, the Imps hit back just five minutes later. N'Gueassan found space on the right and his low cross was allowed to run right through the heart of Hatters' backline to Lenell John-Lewis at the far post and, although the first effort was blocked, John-Lewis made no mistake with his follow-up.

Martin continued to pose problems and had a 20-yard effort well saved by Burch before forcing Brown to almost

turn into his own net.

Talbot dragged a good chance well wide early in the second half, but Town made it 3-1 when Spillane delivered another immaculate cross for Roper to head home from a yard out.

Town were really turning on the style and it took a great fingertip save from Burch to turn Jarvis's 30-yard free-kick just over the bar.

As the game descended into a niggly, narky affair, Kovacs slammed a shot across the face of goal and into the far post and substitute Adrian Patulea couldn't quite net the rebound.

Lee Beevors then curled a dipping effort inches wide with 12 minutes left as Lincoln began to turn the screw a little.

At the other end, Craddock poked just wide after some tireless running by Martin, while Spillane was just unable to connect with a Lewis Emanuel cross.

In the last minute Patulea somehow squeezed home from the narrowest of angles and five minutes of injury time was played, but Luton clung on to bag an ideal late Christmas present.

STAR HATTER Ian Roper: The big man keeps getting better and better

WHAT MICK MADE OF IT



BEAMING Hatters boss Mick Harford was brimming with praise for his side after seeing them clinch a 3-2 home victory over Lincoln City at Kenilworth Road.

Harford admitted he had gone for the jugular by naming an extremely attack-minded side.

He said: "We are in a position where we have to win games and we started with four strikers on the pitch and it was adventurous."

"Asa Hall was confined to his bed last night so he wasn't available."

"We've got a good bunch of grafters."

"They are playing with a bit of passion and a bit of desire allied with the abilities they have got."

He also once again highlighted the crowd for getting right behind his side, who he believes should have calmed the way they played after going 2-0 up.

Harford said: "They make it easy for the lads, to be honest."

"The fans were fantastic today and the atmosphere was spot on."

"I thought the first two goals were fantastic. A great cross by Mickey Spillane and Chris has finished it off fantastically."

"It was a bit harum-scarum and I think they've got to relax when they get 2-0 up."

On the frantic finish which ensued after the Imps had pulled back a goal in the 90th minute, he said: "When the goalkeeper came up I thought: 'Here we go again' and it was deja vu."

"When teams chase the game you have to keep the ball and I thought we did that in the last five minutes."

"I thought we deserved the victory and it was a very good performance."

And he was pleased that his side have almost eradicated the minus 3 points on which they started the season.

He said: "I wanted to get there as quick as possible and we need a good second half to the season. If we can get on level points or plus points at Chester that would be great."

Robins job for Danny

HATTERS: Former Luton Town midfielder Danny Wilson has been appointed as the new manager at League One outfit Swindon Town.

The 48-year old, who has also previously managed Barnsley, Sheffield Wednesday, Bristol City and MK Dons, was sacked from his role at Hartlepool United earlier this month.

However, Wilson got off to a disappointing start in his Robins reign, losing 0-2 at home to Brighton on Sunday.

Almost back to zero – the 2008/09 season so far...

AUG	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Sat 9	PORT VALE	1-0	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	1-1	Martin 49	6,085	24
Tue 26	Reading (LGCP)	1-5	Charles 81	7,498	-
Sat 30	Exeter City	1-0	Parkin 47	5,328	24
SEP					
Sat 6	Macclesfield	1-2	Charles 90	2,349	24
Sat 13	ALDERSHOT TN	3-1	Spillane 17, Hall 89, Martin 90	6,462	24
Sat 20	Rotherham	0-1		4,095	24
Sat 27	CHESTER CITY	1-1	Hall 41	5,731	24
OCT					
Sat 4	Bradford City	1-1	Spillane 88	13,083	24
Tues 7	BRENTFORD (JP2)	2-2	Martin 39, 55 (won 4-3 on pens)	2,029	-
Sat 11	DARLINGTON	1-2	Gnakpa 31	5,560	24
Sat 18	ACCRINGTON	1-2	Hall 34	5,492	24
Tue 21	Grimsby Town	2-2	Craddock 24, 90	4,021	24
Sat 25	Bury	2-1	Craddock 35, Roper 44	3,052	24
Tues 28	BOURNEMOUTH		ABANDONED DUE TO SNOW		
NOV					
Sat 1	Shrewsbury	0-3		6,188	24
Sat 4	Walsall (JP3)	1-0	Jarvis 90	1,844	-
Sat 15	ALTRINCHAM (FA1)	0-0		3,200	-
Tue 18	DAGENHAM & RED	2-1	Davis 6, McVeigh 41 (Luton won 4-2 on penalties)	5,402	24
Sat 22	Altrincham (FA1R)	0-0		2,397	-
Tue 25	Reckdale	0-2		2,901	24
Tue 25	BRENTFORD	0-1		5,248	24
Sat 29	Southend (FA2)	1-3	Spillane 80	4,111	-
DEC					
Tue 2	BOURNEMOUTH	3-3	OG 18, Gallen 56, McVeigh 83	6,773	24
Sat 6	BARNET	3-1	McVeigh 11, Martin 15, OG 88	5,536	24
Sat 13	Wycombe	0-0		5,567	24

DEC	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Tue 16	COLCHESTER (JP4)	1-0	Gnakpa 30	2,638	-
Sat 20	MORECAMBE	1-1	Spillane 51	5,664	24
Fri 26	Chesterfield	2-2	Craddock 56, Roper 90	4,243	24
Sun 28	LINCOLN CITY	3-2	Martin 31, 35, Roper 50	6,643	24
JAN					
Sat 3	Chester City				
Sat 10	ROTHERHAM				
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	MAGGLESFIELD				
Sat 28	Morecambe				
APR					
Sat 4	WYCOMBE				
Sat 11	Lincoln City				
Mon 13	CHESTERFIELD				
Sat 19	Barnet				
Sat 25	ROCHDALE				
MAY					
Sat 2	Brentford				