

Panic sets in as Town lose again

Hatters' stars need composure

Luton Town 1 Bury 2

PRESSING the panic button after conceding goals is costing the Hatters dear according to young defender Ed Asafu-Adjaye, writes Mark Wood.

Having once again taken the lead through a glorious Asa Hall drive, Town tossed it away after the break as they allowed the Shakers to boss virtually the entire second half.

The 20-year-old defender said: "I think first half we came off the pitch feeling quite comfortable. They had a five minute spell where they troubled us with one off the line and one off the post.

"Then they got the goal. I don't know whether it's psychological and we needed to step it up again and we didn't.

"I think first thoughts are a little bit of panic. Even though we are not behind and still well in the game, we just need to settle down for five minutes and play simple football, but we don't, we seem to rush things and we don't keep possession of the ball."

And he believes the Hatter struggled when they changed from their 4-3-3 formation to 4-4-2 after the break.

He said: "I prefer playing the 4-3-3. The three up front, they stop the full-backs getting on the ball.

"I think it was hard with conditions, especially in the second half when we went 4-4-2. Obviously the pitch wasn't brilliant. When it was 4-3-3 we had more people to hit."

Asafu-Adjaye has been played all across Town's back four in recent weeks, but is relishing the trust placed in him.

Headed: "I loved centre-half when I was younger. I don't have the height but deal with it in different ways.

"It's nice to be able to use and trusted to be used in different positions."

Luton started in lively fashion and could have been ahead in under two minutes. Kevin Nicholls' corner drifted right across the face of goal, with Mark Bower just unable to get the decisive touch.

Michael Spillane then skewed a shot wide, before Bury almost took the lead from a 10th-minute corner when the ball ran to Paul Scott at the far post, but his effort was repelled by a combination of Sol Davis and Conrad Logan on the line.

The hosts, though, should have taken the lead on 25 minutes when Tom Craddock's sharp volley from a Nicholls corner forced an instinctive stop from Mark Tyler and Sam Parkin could only loft his follow-up over the bar.

The Hatters then had two almighty let-offs seconds later.

Firstly, a crossfield ball to the lively Elliott Bennett completely opened up Bishop's defence and his cross to Andy Bishop left the dangerous striker with just Logan to beat. Bury's top scorer rounded the keeper, but somehow Luton's players got back in numbers to block out his effort on the line.

Then on 28 minutes, Andy Morrell let fly with a fabulous 25-yard effort that had Logan well beaten and Town breathed a sigh of relief when it cannoned off the right-hand upright and away.

Bury's impressive front two were becoming more and more of a threat with Bishop going close three times in the space of just four minutes.

Town were struggling to break Bury's shackles, but always looked



GIVING IT THEIR ALL: Captain Kevin Nicholls tries to add bite to Town's midfield

dangerous with Craddock on the prowl. And that threat paid dividends with a fine Hall strike on 36 minutes.

Craddock had looked to beat Bury's defence and, as ball ran loose to Hall, he made no mistake, drilling home into the bottom right-hand corner of the net with a sweet strike.

Luton almost doubled their lead with three minutes of the half left when Nicholls picked out Parkin's run in the box, but the burly hitman could only head over.

Having ridden the Shakers hurricane, Town suddenly looked the only team in it and, when Craddock rolled a defender to latch on to Ian Henderson's pass, only a fine block prevented him from doubling the hosts' lead with five minutes left.

Town started the second half where they left off in the first and almost made it 2-0 on 49 minutes. After some lovely interchange play between Michael Spillane and Henderson, Kevin Gallen picked Craddock out with a great cross, but the striker's header lacked power and Tyler saved.

From that moment on the Shakers dominated, with their front two looking particularly dangerous.

A calamitous mistake from Logan almost handed Bury the equaliser on 55 minutes when he thumped a clearance straight at Morrell, and only a

combination of some desperate defending and a boggy pitch denied the visitors.

Luton's luck ran out though on 58 minutes when Bury equalised in fortunate fashion. Bennett's cross took a wicked deflection of Hall and spiralled over the stranded Logan. Spillane tried desperately to clear the dipping ball off the line, but Bishop was on hand to force the ball home.

Gallen fired just wide moments later, but Bury seized the lead for the first time on 66 minutes. Bennett beat Asafu-Adjaye on the left and sent an inviting cross into the near post where Morrell was on hand to power home his diving header.

And Bury almost made the game safe on 74 minutes when Morrell beat the game Asafu-Adjaye in the box but fired straight at Logan.

Former Luton defender Efetobore Sodje then gave his old club another scare when he beat Parkin in the box, but could only prod over the bar from eight yards out.

Luton limped along in the closing stages, and were hardly able to retain the ball against the Bury onslaught.

Bishop was then denied by another goal-line clearance with five minutes left, this time Bower the man on the spot, while Brian Barry-Murphy's brilliant free-kick forced a full-stretch fingertip save from Logan as Bury squeezed the life out of Luton and claimed all three points.

WHAT MICK MADE OF IT



POOR defending cost the Hatters dear as they threw away a first half lead on their way to a 2-1 home defeat against Bury according to Town boss Mick Harford.

And Luton's manager was left to rue Tom Craddock's weak second half header as his side missed out on a great opportunity to make up ground on the clubs directly above them.

He said: "Tom should have made it two, but I thought we were pretty poor second half.

"Grimbs lost today and Bournemouth drew and it was an opportunity to claw some points back on Grimbs.

"We've got to win our games and not worry about anyone else."

And while feeling his side edged the first half, he was under no illusions about how they performed after the break.

He said: "Obviously I'm very disappointed with the result."

"It puts us in a really, really tricky situation now in terms of points per game."

"On reflection we played very, very well first half and started the second half very well.

"It's disappointing in terms of defending the goals and the second half performance."

"It's poor defending. They got a break and took advantage of the break they got and punished us and we got a goal."

"We stuck another striker on and went 4-2-4. It was just far too easy for them in the second half to be honest."

"We had to throw strikers on and it does leave you stretched and leave you vulnerable."

"We've got enough strikers at the club to win us games."

"We just didn't hit them hard enough when we went forward."

"We've had the lead in the last three games."

"People would say we've got a slim chance now with 18 games left to play for."

"It's going to be very, very difficult, but we keep the faith and keep trying and playing the right way."

And Harford is baffled by the way his charges freeze after conceding a goal.

He added: "I think it was a mental thing."

"When we concede a goal the players freeze or get nervous."

"In all fairness to Bury, they were a far better team than us for the last half hour."

New date set for Mariners fixture

HATTERS: Last night's scheduled League Two relegation clash between Luton Town and Grimsby was postponed on Monday due to the heavy snow. The rearranged fixture will take place on Tuesday, March 17.

STAR HATTER

Ed Asafu-Adjaye. Gave everything he had.

In positive territory at long last – the 2008/09 season so far...

AUG	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Tue 5	PORT VALE	1-3	Parkin 35	7,149	24
Tue 12	PLYMOUTH (LGCP)	2-0	Jarvis 15, Plummer 77	5,339	24
Sat 16	Gillingham	1-0	Parkin 3	6,085	24
Sat 23	NOTTS COUNTY	1-1	Martin 49	7,498	-
Tue 26	Reading (LGCP)	1-5	Charles 81	5,328	24
Sat 30	Exeter City	1-0	Parkin 47	2,349	24
SEP	Macclesfield	1-2	Charles 90	6,462	24
Sat 6	ALTRINCHAM	3-1	Spillane 17, Hall 89, Martin 90	4,095	24
Sat 20	Rotherham	0-1		5,731	24
Sat 27	CHESTER CITY	1-1	Hall 41	13,083	24
OCT	Bradford City	1-1	Spillane 86	2,029	-
Tues 7	BRENTFORD (JP2)	2-2	Martin 39, 55 (won 4-3 on pens)	5,560	24
Sat 11	DARLINGTON	1-2	Gnakpa 31	5,492	24
Sat 18	ACCRINGTON	1-2	Hall 34	4,021	24
Tue 21	Grimbsy Town	2-2	Craddock 24, 90	3,052	24
Sat 25	Bury	2-1	Craddock 35, Roper 44		24
Tues 28	BOURNEMOUTH		ABANDONED DUE TO SNOW		
NOV	Shrewsbury	0-3		6,188	24
Sat 4	Walsall (JP3)	1-0	Jarvis 90	1,844	-
Sat 8	ALTRINCHAM (FA1)	0-0		3,200	-
Sat 15	DAGENHAM & RED	2-1	Davis 6, McVeigh 41	5,402	24
Tue 18	Altrincham (FA1R)	0-0	(Luton won 4-2 on penalties)	2,397	24
Sat 22	Rochdale	0-2		2,901	24
Tue 25	BRENTFORD	0-1		5,248	24
Sat 29	Southend (FA2)	1-3	Spillane 80	4,111	-
DEC	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
Tue 16	COLCHESTER (JP4)	1-0	Gnakpa 30	2,638	-

DEC	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
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, 33, Roper 50	6,643	24
JAN	Chester City	2-2	Martin 22, Emanuel 27	1,652	24
Tue 13	Darlington	0-0	Martin 30	2,319	24
Sat 17	Brighton (JPSF1)	2-0		6,127	-
Tue 20	BRADFORD CITY	3-3	Hall 5, 90, Waisu 37	6,053	24
Sat 24	Bournemouth	1-1	Hollands og 11	5,230	24
Tue 27	Bournemouth	1-2	Hall 36	5,545	24
Sat 31	BURY				
FEB	Accrington				
Sat 7	Dagenham & Red				
Sat 14	BRIGHTON (JPSF2)				
Tue 17	SHREWSBURY				
Sat 21	Port Vale				
Sat 28	Port Vale				
MAR	Gillingham				
Tue 3	EXETER CITY				
Sat 7	Notts County				
Tue 10	Aldershot Town				
Sat 14	GRIMSBY TOWN				
Tue 17	MACCLESFIELD				
Sat 21	Morecambe				
Sat 28	ROtherham				
Tue 31	ROtherham				
APR	WYCOMBE				
Sat 4	Lincoln City				
Sat 11	CHESTERFIELD				
Mon 13	Barnet				
Sat 18	ROCHDALE				
Sat 25	ROCHDALE				
MAY	Brentford				
Sat 2	Brentford				