

Luton make hay at Meadow Lane

by Alec Swann

08/09

THE Hatters recorded their second successive away victory with a 2-0 win against Notts County at Meadow Lane last night.

If they were not at their best at the weekend, Mick Harford's charges put that right with a committed performance that was not short on quality.

With an attacking line-up causing the home side plenty of problems, the visitors were well worth the points that they so desperately need.

The opening exchanges were fairly cagey. Notts County's threat looked to stem from the pace of their front two – Richard Butler and Jonathan Forte – while Luton were relying on Kevin Gallen to hold the ball up at the head of an attacking 4-4-3 formation.

On a poor looking surface that had obviously felt the effects of the ground share with Nottingham Rugby Club, both sides struggled to make an immediate impact.

There was an element of hit and hope about the play, although it was the hosts who were monopolising possession.

It took until the 12th minute for the first chance to materialise, Matt Hamshaw evading a number of challenges before seeing his cross well cleared by the returning Michael Spillane, before Myles Weston headed weakly at Dean Brill. Seconds later, Ian Henderson floated a tantalising ball across goal, but it failed to find its intended target.

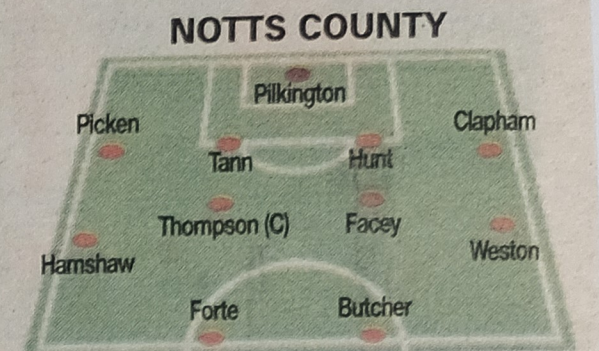
With the game settling down, Tom Craddock's shot from the edge of the area was well saved by the diving Kevin Pilkington in the 18th minute as Luton began to influence proceedings a bit more.

An appeal for a penalty from Hamshaw's cross was rightly waved away and, on 24 minutes, Luton went in front.

Chris Martin picked up the ball in a central position and fired a tremendous left-foot shot from outside the



DELIGHT: Chris Martin celebrates with Keith Keane



Referee: Chris Sarginson (Staffordshire)

Attendance: 2,886 (407 Luton)

area past a helpless Pilkington.

A minute later, Keith Keane optimistically tried his luck from a long way out, but his shot went straight at the County keeper.

If Luton were on the up before the goal, then Martin's opener gave them an extra gear. The lively Henderson struck a clean volley on target from a tight angle on the left and, just after the half-hour mark, a flowing move resulted in Keane firing over from 25 yards.

Mark Bower then prevented Butcher from getting a shot away after Hamshaw's lobbed cross had almost fallen at his feet.

County, though, should have lev-

Notts County 0 Luton Town 2

elled on 36 minutes. Hamshaw's deep cross was headed down by Weston, but Butcher could only scuff his effort wide from no more than five yards out.

Although Luton just about deserved their lead, the hosts still carried a threat, especially from wide on the right – Hamshaw the pick of the players on the field.

And Spillane was forced to hack clear from inside the six-yard box as the clock reached 40 minutes.

The Irishmen then foiled Forte

with a crunching tackle before play moved to the other end.

Adam Tann's rash tackle on Martin gave Craddock the chance to double the lead from the penalty spot, which he duly took.

In the first minute of the second half, Forte stabbed a shot wide under pressure from Bower as County came out after their cuppa with a renewed sense of purpose, which heralded a spell of domination from the home side.

A pointless yellow card for Spillane for a bit of back chat was followed, in the 63rd minute, by Martin firing a volley well wide.

With County in the ascendancy,

STAR HATTER Michael Spillane. Recalled defender was a dominating presence for Town.

Picture by Gareth Owen

Luton's play lost a bit of its fluency, but they still looked a threat on the counter-attack. Martin, who was having a strong game, dragged a shot harmlessly off target as the clash entered the final stages.

With County's efforts carrying an increasing air of desperation, Craddock failed to make the most of some good work by Martin as his hurried left-foot attempt went well wide.

The Hatters were looking comfortable with their lead and Spillane kept the advantage at two goals with a superb tackle on Forte as he closed in on goal. It was all hands to the pump for the Hatters as the last 10 minutes came around, with Jake Howells replacing Craddock with four minutes left on the clock.

In the dying moments, Asa Hall shot straight at Pilkington from distance, Brill halted a potential scare with some good handling and there was a welcome return for Kevin Nicholls as a late substitute.