

'Angel of the North' cuts through stubborn Silkmen

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LUTON TOWN 1
Craddock 69 (pen)

MACCLESFIELD TOWN 0

League Two
Kenilworth Road

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BOFFINS at Liverpool John Moores University could have saved themselves a lot of time and effort by going straight to Luton's super striker Tom Craddock if they wanted to know how to take the perfect penalty.

The research team have revealed their formula for the unstoppable spot kick that promises 100 per cent success but Hatters have got a ready-made penalty taking machine in Craddock.

Apparently the shot should be 65mph with a run up of five to six paces approaching at an angle of 20 to 30 degrees and cross the goalline exactly 0.5m below the crossbar and 0.5m inside either post.

Craddock, whose penalty blasted straight down the middle finally recorded the Hatters' first back-to-back wins this season, has his own surefire way of holding your nerve from 12 yards.

"You have to stay single-minded, pick your spot and if you make the right connection with the ball the keeper's not going to save it regardless," said the Teessider.

"If the keeper dives out of the way it's a good penalty but if he stays where he is you look a bit of a fool."

In a tight match with precious few chances and with regular penalty taker Kevin Nicholls also on the pitch, Craddock knew he had to deliver when the linesman spotted an innocuous handball.

"Nico said he's usually the penalty taker, I didn't know that and I've scored three penalties this season," said the striker. "I haven't played with Nico a lot but I fancied myself

and I fancy myself next time we get a penalty. It doesn't matter who takes it just as long as we hit the back of the net."

His tenth goal of the season leaves him level at the top of the scoring charts with Chris Martin and Asa Hall but Craddock insisted all minds were focussed on league survival, not personal glory.

"Hopefully we can all add to our tallies," he said. "It's nice to score goals but at this part of the season, as long as we win every game, I'm not really bothered about personal accolades for me or anybody else."

Languishing in the lower reaches of the table, Macclesfield – like a lot of clubs this season – seemed quite happy to leave Kenilworth Road with a 0-0 draw before a ball was kicked. From the off it was clear, with a five-man defence and no desire from the full backs to cross the halfway line, that only one team wanted to win the game.

Hatters did all the running yet, bizarrely, Macclesfield hit the cross-

bar on 32 minutes when an unmarked Nat Brown cannoned a volley off the woodwork from ten yards.

Mick Harford's men saw plenty of the ball but the expectant crowd saw little goalmouth action. Luton did hit the crossbar themselves before the break – although it was more down to the Silkmen's keeper John Brain than anything else. Nicholls' curled corner was punched on to the frame of the goal by Brain who breathed a sigh of relief when his error bounced over.

Macclesfield came out stronger in the second half and began to venture over the halfway line without any noses bleeding but

their new-found confidence was dented in the 69th minute when linesman Geoff Law spotted Shaun

Disley handle Craddock's cross.

The game played on when Hall missed Craddock's cut-back after the ex-Middlesborough man had reached the bye-line only to be pulled back when referee Andy Hall saw his assistant's flag. With no Luton player appealing the penalty award came out of the blue and enraged Macclesfield. Their manager, Keith Alexander, said of the decision: "I've got absolutely no idea why it was given and I don't think anyone else in the ground had either. The only people who know are the referee and his linesman."

"It was a diabolical decision."

sion and one of the worst I've seen in a long time."

When all the fuss had died down, Craddock stepped up and blasted the ball straight past Brain to win the game. The in-form striker, who at £80,000 must be one of the signings of the season, was in no doubt the penalty was deserved.

"I tried to pull it back but Asa said it came off one of their defenders' arm. I didn't see it but if the linesman did, we'll take that. It must have taken a deflection because it went through his legs and it wasn't when I pulled it back."

"Macclesfield were the same as Grimsby – they packed 11 men behind the ball. We had to keep doing what we were doing, defending well, and hoping we'd catch a break or someone could come up with a bit of magic. Everyone's confident of picking up three points every time we play and that will continue till the end of the season."

His optimism was echoed by first team coach Kevin Watson who said: "We keep saying we believe we'll get out of the mess we're in. It's not of our own doing, we knew that at the start of the season, but we're having a right go at it. We're eighth in the form table. The lads are showing that grit and hard work can get you places."

"We now have everybody fit which is a headache for Mick. We have the

added bonus of Wembley so players are playing for shirts. Subconsciously that little bit more might be going in as everybody wants to play in that game and only 11 can start."

The only downside of the afternoon was the news of relegation rivals Grimsby's win and Chester's last minute draw which leaves Luton 11 points from safety with eight games to play and Watson admitted: "We looked (at the results) and there were a few expletives flying around."

"No disrespect but we feel we're a better side than the majority of other teams in this division. To be where we are is unjust in many ways and to see those results is a bit of a kick in the teeth."

"All we can do is win like we've done against Macclesfield. That's another two points clawed back which is better than nothing and the deficit is closing."

"Whether we can close it quick enough remains to be seen. We're going out there to win games and we're on a good run."

