

An afternoon Eric would have loved

MORECAMBE 1
Drummond 21

LUTON TOWN 2
Martin 43, Gallen 59

League Two
Christie Park

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THERE hasn't been much sunshine to speak of in Luton's hampered league campaign but a third win on the spin helped the fans who made the long trip to the north west honour an icon.

The visit of the Hatters to Eric Morecambe's birthplace was too good an opportunity to pass up and Christie Park paid homage to a man who put Luton Town on the map with his shameless plugs for the club he loved on prime-time TV.

A delegation of fans had already kitted a bronze statue of the comedian on the promenade out in a Luton shirt and the Shrimps' supporters played their part with look-a-likes scattered among the crowd.

Coming from behind to win against a team who were 12 games unbeaten goes to show a few rays of sunshine might be breaking through just in time for a piece of silverware on Sunday.

Luton had a rare midweek break and began the game a little too rested as Morecambe took the lead. A free kick was given away on the right and Shrimps' midfielder Michael Twiss swung a hopeful ball towards the far post. With alarming ease Stewart Drummond rose highest and headed past a stranded Dean Brill.

The goal shocked Luton into action and driven on by the influential Kevin Nicholls, accompanied by new loanee David Livermore in the middle, Hatters began to penetrate the Morecambe half.

They thought they'd pulled level three minutes later only for Asa Hall's perfectly fine close-range header to be ruled out for a push only the referee saw.

Luton kept the pressure up in search of the equaliser which eventually came three minutes from the break.

Nicholls was the provider, sending a dangerous cross into the six-yard box for Chris Martin whose header was so close to the ground he must have grazed his nose. The 20-year-old year old explained: "I had my eye on the ball all the way as it came over and didn't think to do anything else except head it. It fell really low but I was only ever going to head it."

"The goal was a confidence boost – I hadn't scored in a couple of games so it was nice to



MARTIAL ARTISTRY: Kevin Gallen scores the winner at Morecambe on Saturday

get on the end of it. I couldn't really miss, Nico put a great ball in and it was three yards out. I'd have been gutted if I'd have missed!"

Martin almost made it two just before half time when only the merest of touches from Roche denied him his double.

The on-loan Norwich City striker battled for room in the six yard box and his tenacity paid off when he squeezed a shot under the Shrimps keeper that had to be hacked off the line by Drummond.

"I thought it had gone through his legs, unfortunately it spun and stayed on the line," said Martin. "I tried to claim it was over but I the lads said it spun on the line. I think it was only me who was jumping up and down trying to claim it went in."

Brimming with confidence after the restart Hatters picked up where they left off and grabbed the winner just before the hour mark.

Lewis Emanuel's raking pass appeared to ask too much of Tom Craddock on the right wing. Incredibly he kept it in at the by-line, volleying a cross into the box that took a deflection and hung in the air. When it dropped, Hall won a header that put the ball into the path of Gallen, creeping in unmarked. The veteran stabbed his effort into the net past a stranded Roche.

Morecambe had only lost three times at Christie Park so Hatters might have expected a bit more of a fight from Sammy McIlroy's men. A Rene Howe long shot and a Twiss ten-yard effort aside, Brill was rarely tested leaving Martin to reflect on a job well done.

"After a shaky start where they scored I thought we dominated the game," said the striker. "David Livermore and Nico were getting it and giving it and I thought we played some good stuff."

Manager Mick Harford praised Martin for his 11th of the season, and for the goal that never was. "Chris is a big strong boy and stuck his behind in there, twisted and turned and got a shot away that I thought was going over the line" said Mick Harford. "His goal showed what Chris Martin can do – he's gone diving in there and has got a few goals now."

"He plays on that left hand side, cuts in from the line and causes problems."

"It was a good all round performance from start to finish. We had a bit of a blip with their set-piece goal but even then we bounced back from that and Asa scored what I thought was a genuine goal."

"Kevin Gallen came back in from last week and I think he optimised the team. I thought

he was fantastic. His link play, his hold-up play, his awareness around him got people playing. I don't like to single anybody out though. This was a tough place to come and everybody can take a pat on the back for getting a deserved victory."

Even relegation rivals Grimsby winning with an 82nd minute penalty couldn't ruin the day for Harford who added: "There's nothing we can do about Grimsby. I've said to the players if we can carry on playing like that and winning games we'll stay up."

His side can now set their sights on Scunthorpe and the cup final which will be a special day for the Suffolk-born Martin. "I've got a big bus full coming from Beccles that my Dad's organising so I'll have a few family and friends coming down."

"All the lads have got busses coming down – being a local lad I think Keith Keane's got 100-odd tickets. It'll be a good occasion."

"We've hit form at the right time I suppose you could say. There's important games coming up and as we keep trying to stress the league is more important but the bonus of Wembley is massive for the lads."

"We've got to be ready – no-one remembers the losers."