

Hatters' hat-trick as Forest are felled

by Alec Swann

LUTON Town extended their unbeaten record to four games with a 1-0 victory at Forest Green Rovers.

In a contest that was instantly forgettable, the visitors shaded proceedings and were just about worth the points although they couldn't fail to play any worse.

The Hatters opted for a slight change in formation, playing three across the back in order to incorporate the returning Alan White. That left Freddie Murray in a more advanced role wide on the left with Callum Reynolds given the same job on the opposite side.

At the impressive New Lawn stadium, the initial skirmishes were fairly innocuous.

Forest Green had the better of them although that counted for little as both sides struggled to keep hold of the ball for any length of time on a perfect surface.

The first effort on goal arrived in the 11th minute, a Luton corner resulting in George Pilkington directing a header at the target only to see Andy Taylor clear off the line.

Tyler was forced into action on a quarter of an hour, dealing well with an inswinging free-kick, a method of attack that looked to the hosts' most potent threat.

With a method that left their midfield as spectators, Forest Green were relying on a direct approach and any scraps they could pick up.

That being said, they were still having the better of things as Luton looked less than comfortable with the formation they were employing.

However, they did create the next chance just shy of the half-hour mark, Asa Hall meeting Murray's cross firmly, but sending his header narrowly wide of the left-hand post.

Minutes later, Kevin Gallen centred for Tom Craddock when a shot at goal would've been a better option and Andy Burgess wasted an attacking free-kick with a poor ball out wide.

These chances signalled a marginal turning of the tide as Luton began, at last, to impose themselves on the game.

Even if their play had picked up a bit, the

HIT AND MISS: Luton's top scorer Tom Craddock netted the winner but missed a penalty



Picture by Gareth Owen

Forest Green Rovers 0 Luton Town 1

Hatters looked less than comfortable with their formation.

Numerous passes were either poorly directed or weighted and, after Rovers had briefly threatened with a quick break, it was little surprise that the half finished goalless.

Rossi Jarvis replaced Murray at the break, a move that saw the visitors revert to a more familiar 4-4-2 - Jarvis on the right and Burgess on the left - but it was Rovers

who opened the second half the brighter.

Luton were still struggling to find anything resembling fluency. Their passing, which generally bypassed the midfield, was sloppy and possession was rarely kept for longer than a few seconds.

As poor as the fare was, a goal finally arrived in the 57th minute. Mark Ellis made a hash of a back header and Craddock pounced to poke the ball past Terry Burton.

Hall then had a header saved low down by Burton as Luton sought to increase their advantage.

For all their endeavour, and it wasn't in short supply, Rovers were ineffective going forward, in fact it took until the 68th minute

STAR HATTER: George Pilkington. Solid and dependable. Standout performer on a poor night.

FOREST GREEN



Subs not used: Pass, Elise, Pugh

LUTON TOWN



Subs not used: Gore, Howells, Gnakpa

Referee: Rob Lewis (Shropshire).

Assistant referees: Paul Rees, Mike Granda.

Fourth official: Andy Newell.

Attendance: 1,805 (Luton 869).

Bookings: Stonehouse, 62; White, 73.

for them to have a shot at goal, Paul Stonehouse firing wide from 25 yards.

Midway through the half, the Hatters wasted a golden opportunity to wrap things up. Shane Blackett's surging run ended with Andy Taylor bringing him down, but Craddock could only hammer his spot kick against the crossbar.

The miss seemed to spur Rovers into action and they put in a couple of dangerous crosses, but these were well dealt with by the Luton defence.

Substitute Ross Stearn shot straight at Tyler in the 85th minute - Rovers' first effort on target all night - and a couple of late corners were forced, but that was it for excitement as Luton secured their third straight win.