

Herts-ache on derby day as Boro nick it

LUTON TOWN 0

STEVENAGE BOROUGH 1
Laird 85

Blue Square Premier
Kenilworth Road 09/10

BY JAMES CUNLIFFE

IT could be the straw that broke the camel's back.

A sucker punch from Scott Laird five minutes from time handed Luton Town their first defeat at home and third of the



FORLORN FIGURE: Luton boss Mick Harford at the final whistle

season sparking chants of 'Harford out' and post-match protests from fans to the board.

Two outstanding saves from Boro's Chris Day, one at the death, kept Luton out, but they just weren't good enough.

The fact that a Stevenage side, who had never played competitively at Kenilworth Road before, dominated the first half spoke volumes.

Luton made three changes to the side that dramatically beat Cambridge United at the weekend. Ed Asafu-Adjaye was handed his first start of the season after a long injury lay-off, while captain Kevin Nicholls returned after serving a three-match ban and striker Tom Craddock was reinstated to the starting line-up after being dropped at the Abbey Stadium.

Harford had brought his seventh forward to the club earlier in the day in Peterborough United loanee Ben Wright, but with fellow Posh player Liam Hatch suspended after his red card against the U's the manager chose the unusual step of putting Asa Hall in attack.

It proved to be pointless as Town struggled to get out of their own half. Time and again the ball was hoofed up-field to Craddock, who was beaten in the air by Boro's defensive pairing of Mark Roberts and Michael Bostwick.

The experiment lasted 20 minutes as Hall dropped back into a five-man midfield to stop to wave after wave of, albeit, toothless Stevenage attacks.

It was Hall however who registered Town's first effort on goal just after the half-hour mark when Adam Newton took a break from being Mr Invisible on the right to burst into the box and find the midfielder with a reverse pass. Ironically, despite all of the furore over diving of late, had Hall been a striker – or, even better, Kevin Gallen – Luton could have had a shout at a penalty as he nicked the ball from keeper Day's dive at his feet but chose to stay on his feet, swivel and fire at the goal.

Luton were then lucky to survive a concrete penalty shout six



BACK FROM SUSPENSION: But talismanic skipper Kevin Nicholls couldn't prevent Hatters from losing their unbeaten home record

minutes from the interval when Asafu-Adjaye appeared to bring down Mitchell Cole. Town breathed a second sigh of relief four minutes later when Nicholls lashed out at Darren Murphy and was fortunate not to see red on his return from suspension. The Hatters offered more after

the break with Newton the chief agitator. After an anonymous first 45 minutes it looked as though Harford had issued special instructions for his men to recognise he was actually on their side.

Every time he was picked out by an orange shirt the Boro left



NOT THIS TIME, CLAUDE: Substitute Gnaka had his effort saved at the death by Boro keeper Chris Day

back, Laird, looked worried. And with the winger on the ball Craddock suddenly looked dangerous, and somewhat relieved he was no longer being used as target practice. The pair linked up on 58 minutes but the striker's shot from the edge of the area was always rising. When Claude Gnaka was brought on after the hour mark the threat from the right doubled, with Town finally looking like they had a game plan. But before the Frenchman

replaced Asafu-Adjaye the right back was on hand to keep Stevenage out. He cut out a dangerous cross from Chris Beardsley before Mark Tyler snuffed out the midfielder's second bite at the cherry. At the other end Day produced the save of the match, his fingertips pushing Craddock's goalbound effort onto the post. The goal came as a shock but Luton were still not out of it. Newton looked to have

rescued a point with a fierce daisy cutter, and he was practically turning celebration until, out of nowhere Day tipped around the post. It was curtains for Luton and it could now be curtains for their manager.

LUTON: Tyler, Asafu-Adjaye (Gnaka, 66), White, Pilkington, Newton, Nicholls (Wright, 80), Craddock, Hall, Howells (88 Charles), Jarvis, Murray
SUBS: Blackett, Gore.
Attendance: 8,223 (793)

BLUE SQUARE PREMIER TABLE

	HOME					AWAY								
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
5 Mansfield	14	5	1	1	18	6	2	1	4	8	12	6	23	
6 York	12	5	2	0	14	5	1	2	2	4	5	8	22	
7 Tamworth	13	4	2	0	10	5	1	5	1	7	7	5	22	
8 Luton	13	4	1	1	10	3	2	3	2	7	10	4	22	
9 Kidderminster	14	5	0	2	12	6	1	3	3	8	9	5	21	
10 Altrincham	14	2	4	1	7	6	3	2	2	9	7	3	21	

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