

New boy is Wright man for the Hatters

LUTON TOWN 2
Hall 19, Wright 24

TAMWORTH 1
Rodman 59,

Blue Square Premier
Kenilworth Road

BY TOM LEECH

IT is an unwritten rule in football that under-performing teams will nearly always win their first game under a new manager.

Tamworth were supposed to be the sacrificial Lambs for Luton caretaker boss Alan Neilson's spell in charge of the Hatters.

Instead his side's fragile confidence was still evident as they followed up a commanding first half display where they raced into a two-goal lead with a second that was so shaky it nearly allowed Tamworth a share of the spoils.

Asa Hall and new loan signing Ben Wright had the home fans smiling again after the departure of Luton legend Mick Harford as boss midweek in an opening 45 minutes where Hatters were rampant.

But Alex Rodman pulled a goal back for the Lambs on the hour mark and only some wasteful finishing, and desperate defending could preserve the three points for Neilson's team that moved them back into the BSP play off places.

There were two changes from Tuesday night's demoralising defeat to Stevenage as Luton's recent Peterborough United link was on show up front. Liam Hatch was joined in attack by fellow loanee from London Road, Wright for his first home start and out-of-sorts Tom Craddock was dropped. Jake Howells also had to make do with a place on the bench.

The boos and jeers of midweek at Kenilworth Road were replaced with a tremendous reception for Neilson and coach Kevin Watson as they made their way to the dug out recently vacated by Harford.

Under the new stewardship Hatters certainly began brighter than they have in recent games. Within five minutes Wright and Rossi Jarvis had both drawn decent saves out of Tamworth's



HAVING A GO: Tom Craddock should have made it three to the Hatters with this chip

Danny Alcock and Hatch was leading from the front, chasing down every loose ball as Luton searched for an early goal.

The breakthrough finally came on 19 minutes courtesy of a lovely one-two between the Posh duo. Hatch's dogged run down the right couldn't be halted and he fed the ball to Wright in the box. With a sublime back heel into the path of Hatch, Tamworth were finally cut open. A last ditch sliding tackle thwarted Hatch but the ball tumbled straight to the feet of Hall who calmly slammed his shot beyond the reach of Alcock.

Luton's afternoon got even better five minutes later when Wright marked his first start with an absolute peach of a goal. When Kevin Nicholls' challenge in the middle of the park left the Lambs exposed, Hatch raced clear alongside Wright and only two Tamworth defenders for company. Hatch held the ball up perfectly for his strike partner to run clear and shape up for a shot just inside the area. He cut inside and

went for goal, only to see his effort blocked by a leap from Tamworth's Michael Briscoe - that looked suspiciously like it involved his hand. The calls for a penalty went up but the 21-year-old tried a second time, curling an inch-perfect shot into the top corner of the net.

Hatters had a penalty appeal turned down on the half hour mark when Wright was sent tumbling after Hall had picked him out with an incisive pass. While he was heading away from goal, there did seem to be contact, however the referee waved away the protests.

The visitors had very little of the ball and in the Luton net Mark Tyler was having one of his quieter afternoons. Only a long range effort from Lambs' midfielder Simon Russell forced a save from the Hatters' keeper.

The Lambs looked so toothless in fact it was puzzling to see them sit one place above Luton in the table before the game. A lot of smaller conference teams had

been Hatters' undoing so far this season but the Staffordshire outfit were no match for the home side in the first 45 minutes.

After the break Tamworth improved dramatically and Tyler had to be brave, diving at the feet of Ben Pritchard on 55 minutes to deny the Lambs' midfielder. They had their own penalty claim as well when Nick Wright fell under pressure from Freddy Murray after a mazy run into the box.

Just before the hour they were back in it through some static Luton defending. A free kick was whipped in from the right and Tamworth's Wright met it at the near post flicking it on. It caught Hatters out and Rodman was allowed to ghost in and stab the ball over the line from close range.

The Lambs' forward should have had a second moments when captain Chris Smith was allowed to head back across the six-yard box from a corner. Rodman had bags of time to place his volley but went for power and drilled it



straight at a relieved Tyler. The acting manager shuffled his pack soon after, replacing Ed Asafu-Adjaye who is still short of match-fitness for Claude Gnackpa.

The Frenchman moved to right wing and Adam Newton slotted into right back. Neilson also made a change up front with Hatch, who suffered a clash of heads with a Tamworth defender just before the break, making way for Craddock.

The Teessider almost got his name on the score sheet on 71 minutes when another quality knock down from Wright set up a chance. Craddock got in-between his markers to loop the ball over keeper Alcock and inches above the crossbar.

The substitutes combined on 74 minutes when Gnackpa cut out a pass and galloped forward. Only Craddock was in support and the striker did well to control the ball and get a shot at goal after Gnackpa's heavy pass almost curtailed the move.

Minds were quickly reverted to defence four minutes later however when Tamworth spurned the chance of the game. Jake Sheridan's deep free kick flew into a packed penalty area and somehow Pritchard rose undetected. Thankfully his free header from six yards out lacked accuracy and Hatters escaped unpunished.

Ryan Charles continued his return from injury with a sub-

stitute appearance ten minutes from time, replacing the impressive Wright.

But by now it was defenders Luton needed on the pitch as Tamworth ploughed forward at every opportunity. In the dying seconds of the game Hatters were penned back, desperately clearing every attack. The hard work was almost undone when Rossi Jarvis appeared to handle inside the box, but the referee was consistent and just like before turned the appeals for a spot kick down.

LUTON: Tyler; Asafu-Adjaye (Gnackpa 63), White, Pilkington, Murray; Newton, Nicholls, Hall, Jarvis; Hatch (Craddock 66), Wright (Charles 80). Subs: Blackett, Howells. Attendance: 6,297 (270 Tamworth)

SHOULDERING RESPONSIBILITY: Sub Claude Gnackpa gets stuck in

BLUE SQUARE PREMIER TABLE

		HOME					AWAY								
		P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Oxford Utd	15	6	1	0	17	3	5	2	1	12	7	19	36	
2	Kettering	15	4	2	1	13	4	5	1	2	9	7	11	30	
3	Stevenage	14	3	3	0	10	4	4	3	1	10	6	10	27	
4	Musfield	15	6	1	1	19	6	2	1	4	6	12	7	25	
5	Luton	14	5	1	1	12	4	2	3	2	7	10	5	26	
6	Kidderminster	15	5	0	2	12	6	2	3	3	6	9	6	24	

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