

# Kevin rules late slump

Luton Town 2 (0)  
Cambridge United 2 (0)

DESPITE dominating for almost the whole game, on-loan Luton stopper Kevin Pilkington was left to lament Town's capitulation in the last 10 minutes of their encounter with Cambridge United, writes Mark Wood.

The Hatters had been in full control of the match thanks to Claude Gnaka's first goal of the season and Tom Craddock's 30-yard rocket, but conceded two goals to substitute Danny Crow and gave away two penalties in the last 10 minutes – one of which was brilliantly saved by Kevin Pilkington – as the play-off-chasing U's snatched a point at the death.

Kevin Pilkington said: "Eighty minutes I've had nothing to do. They've not tested us for 80 minutes, which shows how good we were defensively.

"It was a great performance up to then. We've passed the ball well, there's been lots of movement and we've been solid defensively and not had a lot to do until the last 10 minutes. So we're disappointed."

The Hitchin-born keeper did fantastically well to save Robbie Willmott's effort in the build-up to the U's first goal, but his luck was out as the rebound fell straight into the path of Crow.

He said: "They put us under pressure. I don't think we were panicking, they put the ball in the box a lot more than they had done.

"Even with the first goal I've got a good hand to it but Crowy has followed it in."

And he was critical of the decision to give U's their first penalty for a foul on Jai Reason, who appeared to handle the ball, by Freddie Murray.

On U's quickfire comeback, he said: "Obviously they scored straight away and there's a dubious penalty decision. I didn't see there was any contact for the first one, but the referee has given it



AND HOW ARE YOU: Luton and Cambridge players have a chat as U's player receives treatment at Kenilworth Road on Saturday

and you've got to deal with it.

"I then saved the penalty and I thought that's it, we will hang on but they've got the one in the last minute and they score that one."

And, on his unusual penalty stance, which saw him stand close to his right-hand upright, Kevin Pilkington added: "I'd seen Kasper Schmeichel do it a little bit and he saved the penalty the other week so I thought I would try it out and it worked for the first one."

Town played some great stuff for the first 20 minutes of the first half, but it was the visitors who almost snatched the lead after just two minutes. Reason muscled Keith Keane off the ball in the box but he could only curl his effort just wide of the far post.

A long ball forward from Freddie Murray picked out Keane in the box five minutes later, but his flick header was easily saved by Danny Potter.

Kevin Nicholls, whose set-pieces caused problems all afternoon, almost undid the U's defence on 11 minutes, but Shane Blackett's powerful header was blocked in the six-yard box.

The early pace of the game, though, waned as both sides had players booked and the openness of the early exchanges became more calculated and stagnated.

Too often the Hatters fell foul of

the linesman's flag and it wasn't until the 44th-minute that the game received the kiss of life.

A lovely Luton move saw Adam Newton feed the ball into Gallen on the edge of the box and his first-time pass looked to have set Craddock free until Wayne Hatswell barged him over.

However, controversial referee Michael Naylor was unmoved and waved away Town's claims for a free-kick, which would surely have been followed by a red card.

At the other end, Reason fired an effort just over as a largely uneventful half drew to a close.

The Hatters dominated 35 minutes of the second half. Craddock twice had opportunities before Gnaka broke the deadlock just after the hour.

Having won a free-kick after a powerful run, the Frenchman popped up in the box to turn home Nicholls' dangerous delivery for his first Hatters goal since the winner at Wembley in April.

Craddock went close three more times, twice from Nicholls' set-pieces, before Newton should have doubled Luton's lead on 71 minutes.

Rory McAuley's terrible touch fell straight into the winger's path, but Newton could only pull his shot wide of the near post with just Potter left to beat.

**STAR HATTER:** Star Hatter: Full of running and a fantastic strike for his goal.

But Luton did double their lead with 11 minutes left. Newton's cool pass found Craddock in acres of space and he was allowed to turn before rifling a 30-yard gem into the top right-hand corner.

Craddock then turned the game on its head with an unbelievable fightback.

A ball across the box caught Freddie Murray short and Robbie Willmott was allowed to gallop through. Kevin Pilkington pulled off a fantastic stop to deny the winger but substitute Crow was on hand to head the ball into the unguarded net.

And things went from bad to worse when the U's were handed a dubious penalty seconds later. Kevin Pilkington failed to come for a deep cross and Crow was allowed a free header back across goal at the far post. Reason seemed to use his hand to control the ball before Murray was adjudged to have fouled the midfielder as he challenged for the ball.

Holroyd stepped up to take the penalty but Kevin Pilkington dived low to his right to save the striker's spot-kick.

The hosts almost made the game safe with another fine move with five minutes left. Keane, Gallen and Gnaka were all involved, but Nicholls' long-ranger took a slight deflection as it flew over the bar.

And Cambridge snatched a point in the second minute of injury time as Lady Luck came to their rescue. A deep free-kick into the box caused all kinds of problems and Murray's flick cannoned off the right-hand upright and into the path of Crow.

Nicholls threw himself into the challenge to try and stop the substitute from getting his shot away, but caught Crow in the process, and referee Naylor once again pointed to the spot.

This time Crow stepped up and calmly slotted the ball low to Kevin Pilkington's left as Cambridge grabbed revenge for Luton's fantastic fightback at the Abbey Stadium in September.