

JUST NOT THEIR NIGHT

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THEY didn't deserve to lose, but lose they did as the Hatters succumbed 1-0 to Kettering Town at Kenilworth Road, *writes Alec Swann*.

An entertaining contest between two promotion chasing sides was settled by Ritchie Partridge's second half goal.

On a saturated surface, Anthony Elding wasted an excellent chance to put the visitors in front as early as the fifth minute.

A superb ball by Andre Boucard found Marcus Kelly whose cut back reached Elding a few yards out, but his volley was weakly directed straight at Kevin Pilkington and two minutes later the Poppies' striker beat the offside trap before seeing his lob drift past the far post.

The visitors settled far quicker than their hosts who were struggling to find any rhythm and it wasn't until 11 minutes in that they fashioned anything of note.

Craddock then dragged a left-footed effort wide after being sent through

by Newton as the Hatters began to come into the contest.

Alan White hammered a shot into the hanging advertising boards below the scoreboard, Craddock tried his luck from distance and Lee Harper did well to save Kevin Gallen's strike low down to his left.

A clumsy first touch let Craddock down as a quick break played him in on the edge of the box with five minutes of the half left and Simon Heslop found Pilkington with a speculative strike from a long way out.

Craddock, who was looking extremely sharp, then exchanged passes with Gallen only for Greg Taylor to deny him with a well-timed tackle.

The second period started as the first ended with Luton having the better of it although Kettering were still looking dangerous, especially on the break.

The ball found the net for the first time in the 53rd minute, but Ian Roper's challenge on Pilkington was

adjudged to be illegal.

Luton kept pressing, but they still couldn't find a way through and, as is often the case, they went behind in the 65th minute.

Partridge gathered the ball wide on the right, cut inside his marker and the covering defence before curling a pin-point left-footed shot beyond Pilkington and into the top left corner.

Matthew Barnes-Homer was introduced for his Luton bow with 20 minutes left and Gnackpa saw his right wing cross deceive Harper and cannon back off the post.

With the frustration rising, Luton tried to force their way back in, but they were successfully repelled as Kettering left with all three points to their name.

HATTERS: Pilkington, Blackett (Barnes-Homer 70), White, G Pilkington, Murray, Nicholls, Keane, Newton, Gnackpa, Gallen (Emanuel 83), Craddock.

Substitutes: Gore, Jarvis, Cain.

POPPIES: Harper, Roper, Dempster, Marna (Dance 68), Taylor, Heslop, Boucaud, Elding, Partridge (Wrack 85), Kelly, Davis.

Substitutes: Thelwell, Cooper, Thomas