

Players miss winning goal from Gnakpa

Gateshead 0 (0) Luton Town 1 (1)

WEARY Hatters captain George Pilkington admitted that most of the Luton team didn't see Claude Gnakpa's winner go in at Gateshead on Saturday, writes Mark Wood.

Uninspiring Town were gifted victory when Tyensiders stopper Paul Farman allowed an innocuous Gnakpa cross to trickle under his body and over the line midway through the first half.

Pilkington said: "I think half the lads didn't really see it to be honest because we were getting back into shape! It was bad luck for them, good luck for us."

And although Pilkington admitted that Luton were under the cosh at times, he was delighted that he had managed to hand on to all three points.

He said: "It wasn't the prettiest of games, but to travel for four and a half hours and come away with the three points today was the most important thing."

"They started very, very well. They are a good footballing team. They hit the bar straight away from the kick-off."

"I think first half we dominated after that first 10 minute spell."

"We rode our luck a bit at set-pieces at times but managed to come away with the win and clean sheet."

"We obviously haven't had a lot of games over the last month."

"We have been training really, really hard and we had the game

behind closed doors against QPR midweek and the lads played really well.

"There's a lot of work to do, but to start the new year with the three points is the way to go."

"The games are going to be coming thick and fast and it's a good way to start the new year with a win and hopefully we can go on a bit of a run."

Town struggled throughout at the vacuous Gateshead International Stadium which welcomed it's biggest crowd of the season, 1,218, with 569 of them from Luton, and were fortunate to win a game which struggling Gateshead dominated.

The hosts made a blinding start and almost took the lead after just 20 seconds. Graeme Armstrong robbed Gnakpa on the left and his swirling cross beat Kevin Pilkington but cannoned off the bar.

Seconds later Phil Turnbull lobbed the ball into the Luton box and Daryl Clare fired straight at Kevin Pilkington from close range after Shane Blackett had failed to head clear.

Blackett was then booked for a rash challenge before being forced off with a groin injury.

In-between, Kris Gate sent a long-range volley straight at Kevin Pilkington, while Tom Craddock closed down a Farman clearance only to see the ball fly wide.

Gradually Town worked their way into the game, with Jake Howells sending a tame curler straight



LUCKY BREAK: Claude Gnakpa crosses the ball in for Luton's winner

at Farman before Craddock's lovely through-ball played the youngster in on 22 minutes, but Farman was quickly off his line to save with his legs.

The 20-year-old Gateshead goal-keeper then gifted Luton victory with the biggest of clangers on 28 minutes when he allowed Gnakpa's tame low cross to creep through his grasp, under his body and, somehow, over the line.

The home side then wasted a gilt-edged opportunity to level eight minutes later when Armstrong sent a thumping header straight at Kevin Pilkington from just a few yards out.

Gateshead were even more in the ascendancy after the break but couldn't find a way through.

Clare conjured up some quality on the edge of the area to tee up Wayne Phillips soon after the break, but George Pilkington was in the right place at the right time to block the winger's effort.

At the other end, the unusually quiet Matthew Barnes-Homer turned on a sixpence and put in an inviting cross for Craddock, but

his header flashed just wide.

Action was at a premium, with the Hatters being forced to battle hard all over the pitch.

Turnbull fizzed an effort just over the hour, while the home faithful thought Gateshead had equalised seconds later when Clare turned home substitute Alex Francis' half-volley, only to see it ruled out by the linesman's flag.

Town's passing continually let them down and, when Barnes-Homer did find time and space with 20 minutes left, he could only skew his effort well wide.

And Gateshead were once again left to curse their wastefulness in front of goal with 14 minutes to go. Baxter's free-kick found Clare and Armstrong completely unmarked in the box, but Clare's header was far too high with Armstrong far better placed.

The Tyensiders dominated the closing stages, with Phillips and Francis both flashing wide, before, two minutes into injury time, Hall did superbly to block out Phillips' far post volley as Town clung on for a fortuitous victory.