

Hatch snatches victory as Town earn their luck

Barrow AFC 0 (0) Luton Town 1 (0)

A DIVING header from Liam Hatch proved decisive as Luton ground out a well-deserved victory at Barrow on Saturday, writes Mark Wood.

The Hatters have hugely missed the 27-year-old target man all season and he proved the difference with the winner seven minutes from time – just five minutes after it was announced over the tannoy that he was being replaced by Craig Nelthorpe.

However, an injury to the impressive Claude Gnaka forced manager Richard Money to recalculate and it proved to be just the slice of luck Luton needed to down the Bluebirds.

Hatch said: "I saw my name go up and thought here we go. Then Claude's gone down with an injury and they kept me on and from the next corner I get the goal.

"It's always nice to get a few goals and two in two is absolutely fantastic."

And he is pleased with the way his comeback has gone after recovering from his second ankle operation, even though a tight hamstring finally forced him off at the weekend.

He continued: "I'm hoping to keep as fit as possible. The hamstring tightened up a little bit. It's been six months out and three games in a fortnight.

"It's been nice getting back and getting 90 minutes under my belt and to get the winner. Definitely it was a fantastic result. There are some higher teams in the league that have come here and struggled. It's a hard place to come.

"We all knew in the changing



room we had to up our performance from last week.

"That's why the gaffer stuck with the same side, to try and get a better result."

Money had asked for a response from his players after last weekend's disappointing 3-2 home defeat to struggling Ebbsfleet and Town duly delivered with a dominant and professional performance.

It was Town's third straight win on the road in the league and their sixth consecutive clean sheet on their league travels, meaning they haven't lost away from home in the Blue Square since their 3-0 defeat at Wrexham on September 22.

Both sides looked lively in attack, but it was Town who created most of the best chances.

Simon Spender's backpass sold keeper Tim Deasy short on three minutes, but the Barrow stopper was just able to clear under pressure from Adam Newton.

The ball, though, went straight



GET IN: Liam Hatch wheels away in delight after scoring the winner at Barrow

to Tom Craddock who cut inside his man, but his low effort was straight at Deasy.

And Town went close again moments later when Kevin Nicholls' free-kick picked out the unmarked George Pilkington in the box, but he could only head straight at Deasy when he should have done better.

Barrow's best chance of the half arrived on 18 minutes when Jason Walker's flick-on was fired over the bar by the stretching form of Nick Chadwick.

Craddock was a constant menace while Asa Hall also fired in several decent attempts.

And Luton almost took the lead 21 seconds after the break as fog enveloped Holker Street.

Gnaka's canny pass put Hatch away but, as he closed in on Deasy's goal, the striker could only slam his effort into the side netting from a narrow angle.

Town continued to press with Craddock curling over and Gnaka

pa's cross just flashing wide of the woodwork.

Substitute Mark Nwokeji almost made an instant impact when, after a great turn, his low shot was easily saved by Deasy.

Walker forced Mark Tyler to make his only serious save of the afternoon when a deep cross ran to the striker at the far post, before Town made the breakthrough with seven minutes to go.

Captain Kevin Nicholls' outswinging corner picked out Hatch who powerfully planted his header home.

And he almost repeated the trick moments later when another Nicholls corner found the big man, but this time Deasy was able to turn Hatch's header over the bar.

Hatch then sent a first-time effort well over before Gregg Blundell fluffed his chance to take advantage of a Craddock miskick at the death as Luton claimed three invaluable points.