

Last-gasp Hatters have the Ox factor

Luton Town 2 (0) Oxford United 1 (0)

TWO goals in injury time earned the Hatters an amazing 2-1 victory against top-of-the-table Oxford at Kenilworth Road last night.

George Pilkington's header and Keith Keane's goal straight from a corner gave Richard Money's side a win that they deserved on the balance of play, but looked to have squandered due to a lack of finesse in the final third.

What it will do is throw the promotion race wide open and give the Hatters a belief that they aren't always shown.

With both sides opting for a cagey, one up front approach, it was apparent that not conceding early was the priority at both ends.

This didn't mean a timid opening however. With a packed Kenilworth Road producing a lively atmosphere, the home side had the better of the early stages.

Without creating any clear-cut chances – Rossi Jarvis' effort across the face of goal in the ninth minute the best of them – the Hatters were making their intentions known.

A high-tempo to the contest was unsurprisingly leading to a lack of precision and composure, especially from the visitors who hardly strung a pass together in the first quarter of an hour.

That said, Alfie Potter should have out them ahead in the 14th minute when he broke clean through, but Mark Tyler was equal to the task as he saved well with his feet.

Simon Clist then had a volley deflected behind by Kevin Nicholls following a header at the back post from the diminutive Sam Deering.

A quarter of the way in, the

STRAIGHT IN: Keith Keane's corner's eludes keeper Ryan Clarke in the sixth minute of injury time as Town snatched an amazing victory from the jaws of defeat last night



Picture by Gareth Owen

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game was more evenly balanced, but it was Oxford again who had the next attempt, Potter weaving his way past three challenges only to fire his left-footed effort harmlessly wide of Tyler's goal.

The Hatters next threatened in the 27th minute. The previously invisible Tom Craddock found a bit of space on the left and, after strolling past Damian Batt, put a dangerous ball across the six-yard box which was safely negotiated

by the covering defence.

An awful pass from Keane gifted Deering the opportunity to test his long-range shooting skills, but his well-struck shot was straight at Tyler.

With both sides negating the other fairly effectively, a lack of penetration in the final third was the result with Oxford content to shoot from distance.

The hosts were finding it increasingly difficult to make any inroads with Liam Hatch an isolated figure up front and Craddock, who really should have been alongside

Hatch, wasted on the left of a five-man midfield.

Asa Hall gave Ryan Clarke some work to do with a weakly struck shot from outside the area four minutes before the break and two minutes later Craddock, showing what he could do in his rightful position, hammered a shot against the inside of the post following a lovely one-two with Hatch and seconds later forced Clarke into palming away a swerving strike after he cut in from the left.

The second half began with the Hatters on the front foot as they forced a pair of corners that came to nothing but, whereas for the majority of the first half they had been happy to contain, now the emphasis was on pressing forward.

Potter failed to test Tyler from 25 yards as Oxford finally got into Luton's half and Rhys Day was inches from connecting with Deering's tantalising free-kick.

An injury to Hatch brought about the introduction of Matthew Barnes-Homer just shy of the hour, but a personnel change didn't bring about a tactical one.

Jack Midson's header in the 63rd minute didn't have the power to worry Tyler and seconds later Claude Gnaka slashed wide from a promising position.

There was certainly more of a sense of urgency to proceedings, from the home side mainly, Hall curling a shot just over, but it wasn't being translated into meaningful chances.

And, sure enough, if you don't take your chances you inevitably get punished. Potter's teasing cross was headed back across goal by Clist and Matthew Green, who had only been on the field for two minutes, saw his volley deflected

HATTERS (4-5-1): Mark Tyler, Keith Keane, George Pilkington, Janos Kovacs, Fred Murray, Adam Newton, Kevin Nicholls (C, Gnaka 46), Asa Hall (Craig Nelthorpe 77), Rossi Jarvis, Tom Craddock, Liam Hatch (Matthew Barnes-Homer 59).

Substitutes not used: Shane Gore, Jake Howells.

OXFORD (4-4-1-1): Ryan Clarke, Damian Butt, Jake Wright, Rhys Day, Anthony Tonkin, Alfie Potter (Adam Chapman 79), Chris Hargreaves, Dannie Bulman, Simon Clist, Sam Deering (Matthew Green 72), Jack Midson (Francis Green 88).

Substitutes not used: Billy Turley, Mark Creighton.

Attendance: 8,860 (1,500 Oxford).

Referee: R Madley.

Assistant referees: N Lugg and N Wilde.

Fourth official: D Blunden.

Bookings: Alfie Potter, Keith Keane, Janos Kovacs.

Sent off: Keith Keane.

Star Hatter: Keith Keane. Tireless performance in the midfield.

past Tyler.

Barnes-Homer wildly hammered into the Kenilworth Road end with 10 minutes to go, Adam Newton thumped his effort into Jake Wright and Gnaka headed Keane's centre wide before the Hatters got their reward.

Keane's corner was flicked on and Pilkington's stooping header at the back post was glanced past the helpless Clarke.

And astonishingly, a minute later, a scrambled post became a burgled three when Keane's corner went straight in.

A red card for the goalscorer followed for excessive celebration, but nobody among the Hatters faithful would have given a damn