

HATTERSBURG DERAILLED BY BEN'S BRAVE



THE NLP STAR MATCH

THE infamous Luton Outlaws internet message board was hurriedly dragged offline this week.

Someone at the club obviously had the hump – and then had enough.

Pity for Richard Money, then, that the close-to-the-bone fans' forum was back up and running last night. It certainly will not make pleasant reading.

Luton's outside hopes of reaching top spot from either Oxford or Stevenage yesterday died a death thanks to Ben Smith's double.

And that time there's no blaming suspect home form or a 'bloody bog of a pitch'.

Under the watchful gaze of Boro boss Graham Westley, the Hatters' second defeat in a row now has to rule them out of the running. And with York losing at home, perhaps four became two in the race for the championship.

With the top two given the weekend off against their wishes, they couldn't have hoped for a better day as they put their feet up. Manager Money said: "I don't want to say too much. Everyone saw the level of performance."

"It is a disappointing day to say the least. I have my own thoughts. You will know more about them when you see my team selection for Tuesday's game with Mansfield."

"We didn't deserve to lose the match and it was refereed from the touchline, but you come here and know that's how it is. You have to adapt and we certainly didn't."

Luton's superb away record, not even conceding a goal in their last eight games on the road, couldn't save them from



By Sam Elliott

a costly defeat.

There was nothing at all to report in an appalling first half an hour and the first chance only fell to the Hatters with ten minutes to go until half time. Kevin Nicholas' corner had Crawley keeper Simon Rayner fapping. The ball struck Adam Quinn and came off the bar into the grateful grasp of the fortunate gloveman.

Alex Hall was brilliantly denied five minutes later by Quinn's brave block after left-winger Tom Craddock's burst down his unfamiliar right opened up the hosts. Crawley improved after half time and could have been a goal up when Barry Cogan shot over with time on his side.

Steve Evans' men didn't miss the chance 30 seconds after the ball was played in behind the Hatters' defence and Smith was on the end of it, burying high beyond Mark Tyler.

Luton should have been out of the game on 56 minutes. Cogan danced around George Pilkington and the midfielder was inches away from finding the corner.

Money was suitably unimpressed, ringing the changes, and it looked like his gamble was going to pay off 15 minutes from time when two of his substitutes combined for the equaliser – Liam Hatch finding Matthew Barnes-Homer, who swept his shot beyond Rayner.

Then, after getting a foothold, Luton managed to undo all their good work.

Cogan's debatable free-kick was met at the back post by Eddie Hutchinson – able to out-jump Pilkington with ease – and Smith was on the end of his knockdown to tidy up with three minutes to go.

The Luton fans had seen enough and wouldn't have thought Charlie Adenomon missing the chance to complete the job, Tyler doing just enough to sidetrack the striker, but it mattered little.

CRAWLEY TN 2
Smith 55, 57

LUTON TOWN 1
Barnes-Homer 76



HEAD'S UP: Crawley's Ben Smith heads in the winning second goal against Luton

PICTURES: Jon Pugh

THE VERDICT

CRAWLEY went back to the drawing board to re-evaluate their promotion challenge.

Manager Steve Evans said before the match that nothing except three points would do here if his Red Devils had any hope of getting into the play-offs.

They may still be some eight points behind but the Broadfield boss said: "It was all about producing a big performance."

"We wrote a number of characteristics on our board in the changing room. We went through them one by one just before kick-off."

"Energy, passion, commitment, never say die. But in big capital letters it said 'pass the ball'. We had to play them at their own game and we did that."

"We had to win, we had to get three points. It's unusual to sit in there in the dressing room and half time and tell the players that if it is level in injury time then we're sending our keeper up."

"A point wouldn't have suited us but we have a group of players that can play against the big teams."

"If we would have taken all our chances we would have given Luton a bit of a 'drubbing'."