



MISSED OUT: Jake Howells, who was unlucky not to get on the scoresheet for Luton when his first-half strike was ruled offside



FRUSTRATED: Tom Craddock looks for a way through the Mansfield defence but was disappointed

Stags night proves a miserable let-down

MANSFIELD TOWN 0
LUTON TOWN 0

Blue Square Premier
Field Mill

By James Cunliffe
sport@lsnmedia.co.uk

COME to Field Mill they said. There'll be plenty of goals in this one they said. What a load of poppycock. After 44 goals in the last seven meetings

between these two sides, this bore draw served only to prove two things – you shouldn't read too much into stats... and that this was as dire an advert for Conference football as you're likely to see. Jake Howells had a first-half goal chalked off for offside, and that folks, is just about all these two wrote.

Luton started with four changes from the side that lost to Crawley with Kevin Nicholls, Rossi Jarvis, Tom Craddock and Kevin Gallen making way for Claude Gnaka, Matthew Barnes-Homer, Liam Hatch and Howells.

The opening was played at double speed and much of that with Luton on the back

foot with the Stags' tactics proving superior, though that was hardly a plus point for either side. The home team's plan seemed two-fold – kick it long and throw it long.

In fact the ball spent so much time in the air it's a wonder they hadn't taken a peek at Luton's shirt sponsor and assumed they'd get air miles.

As for Town their only point of interest, if you could call it that, was when Jake Howells roamed close to the edge of the Mansfield penalty box, yet he elected to play a wayward square ball to Gnaka when a dip at goal should have been his only priority.

The Hatters had dealt with the directness

well after a shaky start, but there was little in the way of goal threat until the move of the half saw a one-two between Howells and Freddie Murray.

The Irishman flashed a cross into the area but Gnaka was napping and let the ball slip under his boot.

Howells then had the ball in the net with three minutes remaining after Hatch had headed to him unmarked, but unfortunately offside on the penalty spot.

Four minutes into the second session and it looked to be more of the same until half chances for each side brought a modicum of excitement.

Asa Hall, who was one of Luton's better players, came close with a glancing header before Mansfield's first half substitute Michael Brough headed into the side netting at the other end.

A Howells volley just before the hour called Stags' keeper Alan Marriott into his first piece of hard work all evening – an actual save, routine though it was.

Mark Tyler had a harder task minutes later when Gary Mills opted for a rather speculative dig at goal from a 40-yard free kick. It bounced awkwardly but the Luton number

one judged it well. The stalemate looked to be written in stone when Louis Briscoe jinked inside Howells and Murray but wildly slashed a shot wide from an acute angle when a ball fizzed into the Luton danger area could have caused far more damage.

At the other end seconds later a poor effort from Hall, unchallenged on the 18-yard line, seemed to further cement the theory.

Tom Craddock replaced Gnaka on 77 minutes and tried to inject some excitement into this dead duck with a run at the Stags defence late on but that was snuffed out before anyone in the stadium had time to jolt themselves from their comas.

Still, this fifth no-score draw of Luton's season ended the recent run of two defeats in the spin.

LUTON: Tyler, Keane, Kovacs, Pilkington, Newton, Hatch, Hall, Howells (Neilthorpe 84), Gnaka (Craddock, 77), Murray, Barnes-Homer (Nwokeji, 60). Subs not used: Gore, Blackett.

Referee: R Lewis

Attendance: 3,407 (474)

BLUE SQUARE PREMIER TABLE

	HOME					AWAY					GD	PTS	
	P	W	D	L	F	P	W	D	L	A			
1 Oxford Utd	32	13	2	1	33	6	8	5	3	24	16	35	70
2 Stevenage	32	11	5	0	30	10	9	4	4	24	12	37	69
3 York	32	11	5	1	30	12	6	4	5	14	14	18	60
4 LUTON	32	7	3	5	24	17	3	6	3	19	13	12	57
5 Rushden & D's	32	10	3	4	27	18	6	5	4	26	12	23	56
6 Kettering	32	4	5	5	17	13	12	2	4	23	13	14	55
7 Mansfield	34	8	5	2	27	11	8	2	9	27	21	12	55
8 AFC Wimbledon	32	7	3	4	25	7	8	5	5	27	22	23	53
9 Kidderminster	32	11	2	4	30	14	3	6	6	16	19	13	50
10 Crawley Town	32	10	3	4	26	19	4	4	8	13	24	4	49
11 Altrincham	32	5	6	5	23	18	7	4	5	19	14	10	46
12 Wrexham	31	8	4	5	19	12	3	5	6	12	15	4	42
13 Tamworth	34	7	4	7	22	25	3	8	5	12	14	-5	42
14 Hayes & Yeading	34	6	6	3	31	30	4	4	8	17	30	-12	40
15 Histon	31	5	7	3	20	16	5	2	9	15	26	-7	39
16 Solihull	32	6	5	19	15	8	0	8	9	19	29	-4	38
17 Ebbsfleet United	32	5	4	10	19	28	5	3	10	20	36	-25	37
18 Cambridge Utd	32	6	4	7	26	19	2	8	5	18	24	3	36
19 Eastbourne Borough	32	4	6	7	18	26	3	6	9	12	31	-27	33
20 Barrow	29	3	8	4	17	23	4	2	8	16	23	-13	31
21 Gillingham	34	6	3	8	17	20	3	2	12	21	34	-16	31
22 Forest Green	32	4	5	7	14	21	2	4	10	17	37	-27	27
23 Grays Athletic	33	3	3	11	14	30	0	6	10	14	36	-43	18
24 Chester	28	3	1	9	13	19	2	6	7	10	23	-19	3

For more on this game and Saturday's fixture away at Hayes & Yeading go to www.1dexpress.co.uk