

Tenacious Hatters frustrate the Stags

Mansfield Town 0 (0) Luton Town 0 (0)

WORKMANLIKE Luton put in a tenacious and professional display to claim a point at play-off rivals Mansfield Town last night.

The Hatters may still never have won at Field Mill in the league, but this was a gutsy performance from the Town who with a little more luck – Jake Howells having a goal ruled out for offside – could have even grabbed victory.

The Stags made a bright opening, demonstrating on more than one occasion the threat they posed from long throws on either side.

But Town had the first worthwhile effort on nine minutes when Adam Newton's throw was cleared only as far as Freddie Murray on the edge of the box, but the left-back dragged his shot just wide.

Both sides were playing a full part in an open, entertaining game and when Howells charged through on 21 minutes he tried to square to Claude Gnackpa rather than shoot and the chance went.

Louis Briscoe flashed an effort harmlessly wide three minutes later, while Asa Hall turned away from Jon Challinor seconds later, but fired at Alan Marriott.

A Challinor long throw caused more havoc before the referee's whistle curtailed a wonderful chance for the Hatters.

Matthew Barnes-Homer powerfully challenged Luke Jones and Keith Keane's first-time pass released the big striker, only for the referee to harshly penalise the striker as he ran clear.

Hall's powerful volley resulted in Young being stretched from the field and from the subsequent corner Luton almost broke the deadlock. Keane's delivery was flicked on by Hall, but George Pilk-

MY BALL: Matthew Barnes-Homer keeps possession against Mansfield last night



Picture by Gareth Owen

Mansfield (4-4-2): Alan Marriott, Gary Mills, Luke Jones (Michael Brough 35), Louis Briscoe, Rob Duffy, Jon Shaw (Kyle Perry 77), Ryan Williams, Luke Foster (C), Gary Silk, Andy Nicholas, Jon Challinor. **Substitutes not used:** Neil Collett, Kyle Nix, Blair Sturrock.

Hatters (4-4-2): Mark Tyler, Fred Murray, George Pilkington, Janos Kovacs, Adam Newton, Claude Gnackpa (Tom Craddock 78), Asa Hall, Keith Keane, Jake Howells (Craig Nelthorpe 84), Matthew Barnes-Homer Mark Nwokeji 61), Liam Hatch. **Substitutes not used:** Shane Gore, Shane Blackett.

Referee: R Lewis.

Assistant referees: A McIntyre and J Waters.

Fourth official: C Ward.

Yellow cards: Janos Kovacs 57, Adam Newton 88, Liam Hatch 90+3, Mark Tyler 90+4.

Attendance: 3,407 (Luton 474).

Star Hatter: George Pilkington. Classy and composed at the back.

up Hall on the edge of the box, while Pilkington was in imperious form at the other end and did superbly to cut out Briscoe's dangerous cross on 72 minutes.

The Stags upped a gear in the closing stages as they looked the more likely to grab a winner.

Tom Craddock burst on to a crossfield ball by Keane, but Andy Nicholas and Michael Brough combined to block his drive.

Having weathered heavy Mansfield pressure, Luton almost grabbed a winner in the third minute of stoppage time. Craddock hooked the ball back into the box but Nwokeji was just unable to force the ball home.

Town then defended valiantly to secure a valuable point against their play-off rivals.

ington's could only bury his sliding effort into the side netting.

And another half-chance went begging four minutes before the break. Murray and Howells combined well, but the Irishman's pull-back somehow eluded both Hatch and Gnackpa.

Two minutes later Luton did find the net, only to have it dubiously ruled out by the linesman's flag. Barnes-Homer's deep cross was expertly flicked into the path of Howells in the six yard box and, although the youngster toe-poked home, it counted for nought.

by Mark Wood

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The visitors started the second half as they ended the first and were a whisker away from breaking the deadlock four minutes in when Hall flicked his header from Howells' free-kick just wide.

A half-volley by Howells warmed Marriott's gloves on 57 minutes, while the Stags finally managed their first shot on target two minutes later. Janos Kovacs,

who had been tangling with Rob Duffy all evening, was booked for a challenge on the striker and Gary Mills lined-up the free-kick 35 yards out.

His low effort took a vicious bounce in front of Mark Tyler, but the Luton stopper clung on.

Midway through the half and Mansfield finally sprang into life. A deep free-kick found Duffy and he drove across the face of goal. Briscoe picked up the scraps at the far post, but could only blaze wide of the mark.

Substitute Mark Nwokeji teed