

Industrious midfielder shines in debut victory

Luton Town 1 (1) Wrexham 0 (0)

NEW signing Simon Heslop urged Town's supporters to be their 12th man in their quest for promotion after helping the Hatters to a 1-0 victory against Wrexham on Saturday, writes Mark Wood.

The industrious midfielder struck up an excellent partnership with Keith Keane in midfield and the pair's energy helped the Hatters to grind out victory.

Tom Craddock's fine 36th-minute strike proved decisive, while Town had Mark Tyler to thank at the other end as he expertly tipped Andrew Fleming's excellent second half strike on the underside of the bar as Luton kept their first clean sheet at home since mid-September.

He said: "It was brilliant. The fans really got behind the lads today.

"If they keep getting behind us, we've got a lot of home games coming up and they can be our 12th man and give us a push.

"The first half we were really good. Pressing the ball and passing it about in the final third.

"Second half we didn't. It was a little bit more disciplined and we got through the game.

"I was speaking to the lads after the game and they said it was the first time since September they've kept a clean sheet at home."

But he was glad to have got through the game and the 22-year-old believes he will only get better.

He said: "I've only had one game in the last couple of months so it was nice to get another one and I will be stronger for it next time."

And he felt his partnership in the middle with Keith Keane



FULL OF PROMISE:
Simon Heslop battles for the ball on his Hatters debut

worked well, saying: "It's important we have two hard-working midfield players in there. You are not always going to get the run of the ball. It's important to get in challenges and I thought we both did that well today.

"I've had two shots and missed the target with both! Hopefully the goals will come as well but that's not the main aim, that's to win games."

And he believes it's down to the players to calm things down when the action becomes too frantic.

Heslop continued: "There are

times to put your foot on it and settle the game down. That's down to the individual to put your foot on it and settle it down."

Heslop was also pragmatic about the way Town need to play on the bare Kenilworth Road pitch, adding: "It's not great, everybody knows it's not great. You have got to play sensible football. You can't pass it around like Brazil on it."

Keane's wickedly bouncing shot was well saved by Sam Russell on four minutes, Jake Howells' shanked an effort wide and Heslop rolled a tame effort at goal af-

ter combining well with Craddock as Luton dominated.

Wes Baynes fizzed an effort into Mark Tyler's midriff before Luton's fine football got its reward nine minutes before the break.

Heslop's ball left Craddock plenty to do when he received it on the halfway line. The young striker skinned Mansour Assoumani as he burst into the box before unleashing an unstoppable left-foot effort that Russell could only push on to the inside of the post on its way into the net.

Buoyed by the goal Howells put in a great cross moments later but Claude Gnaka could only head tamely at Russell.

Craddock was just unable to connect with Freddie Murray's tantalising cross with two minutes left as Town went into the break fully deserving to be at least one goal to the good.

Luton started the second half as they ended the first, with Craddock, full of confidence, producing some good skill to get him in the box, only to scuff his effort straight at Russell.

Howells powered over the bar on 52 minutes, following a corner that had originally seen Keane kick the corner flag, before Town were forced firmly on to the back foot for the last half hour.

Last season's leading Blue Square Premier scorer Andy Mangano fired straight at Tyler, while Craddock forced Russell to save with his legs on the counter.

Tyler then pulled off a magnificent stop to tip Fleming's thunderous 25-yard effort on to the underside of the bar on 68 minutes and Town proceeded to defend professionally to see the game out.