

Howells about that then!

Ebbsfleet 1 (1) Luton Town 6 (0)

A STUNNING Claude Gnaka hat-trick helped the Hatters to claim an amazing 6-1 victory at Ebbsfleet on Saturday, writes Mark Wood.

Town may have trailed to a calamitous Janos Kovacs own goal at the break but they launched an unbelievable second half comeback as they avenged January's 3-2 home defeat against the Blue Square Premier minnows in majestic fashion.

Lowly Fleet were sunk by Town's big guns, as goals from strikers Tom Craddock, Kevin Gallen and Matthew Barnes-Homer supplemented the mercurial Gnaka's three-goal broadside to earn the Hatters their fifth straight victory.

Promising young winger Jake Howells, who turned 19 on Thursday, supplied the ammunition for two of the goals and was in fine form throughout.

He said: "Until they scored I felt we were the better team and the gaffer said that too. He said keep going and we will get the goals. We got the second straight away and that got us going to get more.

"To go on and get six is great and could be vital for our goal difference at the end of the season.

"It's very good. We are on a good run at the moment. Everyone is enjoying playing football at the moment, and we keep scoring goals."

A swirling wind and slippery pitch made for difficult conditions, but Luton, unchanged from the team that beat Kidderminster Harriers 3-1 on Tuesday night, started well at Stonebridge Road.

Brazilian Magno Vieira had the first notable effort of the day when his slick turn was followed by a drive just wide.

And Luton found it hard to break Fleet down in the first half, as the home side's fast tempo



A GAME TO REMEMBER: The impressive Jake Howells hurdles a tackle, left, while Keith Keane, Tom Craddock and Howells congratulate veteran striker Kevin Gallen on his goal to make it 2-1, which set the Hatters on their way to victory

pressing game on a tight pitch made it extremely difficult for the Hatters.

Moses Ashikodi ballooned a wild effort over the bar before Town went mightily close on 21 minutes. Howells was first to a ball in the box, but Craddock was just beaten to his far post cross with the goal gaffer.

Some haphazard Luton defending almost handed Fleet the lead on 23 minutes, but defender Leon Crooks sliced straight at Mark Tyler from close range before Town hit the self-destruct button seconds later.

An innocuous ball forward was touched back towards the advancing Tyler by Kovacs, leaving him wrong-footed and, scramble as he might, the Luton keeper couldn't quite get back in time and the ball dribbled agonisingly into the net.

Luton should have equalised just after the half hour when Simon Heslop slid a lovely through ball to Craddock but, having been forced slightly wide, the young

striker could only hammer his effort into the advertising hoardings behind the goal as Town trailed 1-0 at the break.

Fired-up Luton completely dismantled the Fleet in the second half and, following a string of corners, equalised after just four minutes, Gnaka powering home a header from a Keith Keane corner.

Within seconds Town were ahead. A throw-in was dummied by Gallen on the edge of the box and Craddock's flick ran perfectly into the path of the veteran striker who fired home.

Craddock should have made it three just before the hour, but after Gnaka had brilliantly won the ball on the halfway line and picked the striker out in the box, Craddock could only send his first-time effort over the bar.

But Luton did make it 3-1 on 66 minutes when Craddock buried a firm volley past Lance Cronin from Howells' cross.

Gallen and Craddock combined

wonderfully with 19 minutes to go, but the veteran curled straight at Cronin before Gnaka struck twice in a minute.

A deft header from Howells' curling cross made it four on 76 minutes, before the Frenchman completed his hat-trick seconds later with a shot into the bottom left-hand corner, following great work by Craddock and a Heslop effort that was stopped on the line.

Gallen sent a header just wide from another Howells cross with nine minutes left before the young winger should have scored a sixth with a minute left.

Substitute Barnes-Homer's ball sent Howells clear but Cronin stood up well to save with his legs.

Ashikodi almost scored a consolation goal in stoppage time before Barnes-Homer made it 6-1 deep into injury time when he muscled his way past Darius Charles to reach substitute Shane Blackett's long ball forward before calmly slipping the ball past Cronin.