



EBBSFLEET UTD 1
Kovacs og. 24

LUTON TOWN 6

Gnapka 48, 76, 77, Gallen 50, Craddock 66, Barnes-Homer 90+4



LUTON FIRE



SUPERSONIC HATTERS READY FOR A RIDE

NOW that's what you call a Gnapka hand! Nearly a year on from Wembley and Luton's epic Johnstone's Paint Trophy triumph, the man that salvaged something special from their damaging season struck again. And how. Claude Gnapka's

THE VERDICT

wonderful winner under the Arch keeps him forever in Hatters hearts. But the midfielder's performance at the more rustic Stonebridge Road could turn out to be

even more significant. Make no mistake, thanks to this Gnapka-inspired second half super show Luton are entrenched in the title race. And they are in there kicking and screaming. While Stevenage were busying finishing the formalities of their Wembley return, and

with Oxford forced to wait until today to tackle Tamworth, Richard Money's in-form side kept the heat soaring. A forgettable first half was washed away effortlessly by rampant Town. Easyjet had overcome Eurostar with supersonic speed. Stevenage and

Oxford will, of course, still fancy their chances of taking top spot. But nobody can ignore a fifth win in five, or indeed a favourable fixture list. Hold on to your hats, folks. This roller-coaster ride of a season has some sharp corners to navigate yet.

Gnapka hat-trick hots up title race



By Sam Elliott

THE NLP STAR MATCH

JUST when we all thought this title race couldn't get any hotter, the Hatters go and cranked up the temperature.

A six-goal second half salvo sends out a quite emphatic message – the Conference should buckle their belts for one of the greatest championship chases on record.

Midfielder Claude Gnapka's brilliant hat-trick means jostling Oxford United and Stevenage Borough really do have company at the top. Town's breath on the back of their necks now not so much warm, but positively scalding.

Luton, until later today at least, move up to second and although manager Richard Money stresses they are still outsiders, Hayes & Yeading and Salisbury both visit Kenilworth Road next.

This was their highest scoring away victory since February 1964. That 6-2 win at Brentford was even bettered by a performance of pure attacking class.

Money said: "We were 1-0 down at half-time and I said in the changing room that we had to stop feeling sorry for ourselves. We did."

"We are well aware that we can't afford to drop much now. I think most people at the minute still think it's between Stevenage and Oxford and it probably is right now."

"But let's see what happens in the next two or three weeks. Let's see where we are, shall we."

It was struggling Fleet's Magno



BURIED: Veteran striker Kevin Gallen fires in Luton's second goal

Vieira who had the first sight of goal. The Brazilian unleashed a trademark long-ranger after 12 minutes and Mark Tyler could only watch on as it went narrowly over his crossbar.

Dangerous Moses Ashikodi tried similar a few moments after. The result on a big day of international rugby was more Stade de France than Stonebridge Road.

The Hatters then hit the self-destruct button. First they allowed Leon Crooks time and space to pluck the ball out of the sky – Luton only spared by the defender's lack of composure in the box.

And then came a moment to give manager Money nightmares. Defender Janos Kovacs over-hit a tricking backpass to his keeper from 25-yards out. Tyler didn't get down quick enough and the ball squirmed into his net for 1-0.

Luton started the second half like they meant business. A flurry of early corners found their reward four minutes after the interval.

The third of them, a left-sided delivery from Keith Keane, found the forehead of Gnapka and the midfielder gave Cronin no chance.

Within two minutes, the game had gone full circle. A quick throw from Ed

Asafu-Adjaye released Kevin Gallen and the veteran front-man did the rest.

England C keeper Cronin got a good head to it but Gallen wasn't to be denied – just days after the 34-year-old ex-QPR front man scored twice to help beat Kidderminster 3-1.

It should have been game over just before the hour mark. Gnapka, keeping his balance, dinked a beautiful ball to the unmarked Craddock, but the striker ballooned his shot miles over.

Fleet were dumbstruck, bewildered by the wave after wave of attacks coming their way.

Craddock wasn't to be stopped, though. Jake Howells' left-wing cross was finished expertly out of the goal-keeper's reach for his fifth goal in his

MATCH STATS

EBBSFLEET v LUTON

1 SHOTS ON TARGET	9
3 SHOTS OFF TARGET	5
4 CORNERS	13
1 OFFSIDE	4
14 FOULS CONCEDED	15
3 YELLOW CARDS	2
0 RED CARDS	0

STAR MAN: Claude Gnapka (Luton)
ATE: 1,923

REF RATING: Rob Whithorn 8/10

EBBSFLEET: 4-4-2: Cronin 6, Heeroo 6, Crooks 6, Charles 6, Collins 6, Stanniss 6 (Wash 79, 8), Shalton 6, Holmes 5, Bailey 6, Ashikodi 7, Vieira 7 (Ginty 79, 5). Subs not used: Salton, West.

LUTON: 4-4-2: Tyler 6, Asafu-Adjaye 7, Pilkington 7, Kovacs 6 (Blackett 85, 3), Murray 7, Gnapka 3, Keane 8, Heeroo 7, Howells 8, Craddock 8, Gallen 6 (Stanniss-Homer 81, 7). Subs not used: Gore, Hall, Newton.

last five matches. A rout from then on was always coming. Gnapka placed a perfect header for 4-1 before finally getting his hands on the match ball seconds after he bundled home Luton's fifth at the second attempt after 77 minutes.

Substitute striker Matthew Barnes-Homer helped sealed the deal deep into stoppage time, one-on-one with Cronin to net goal number six.

The result leaves Ebbsfleet deep in trouble at the foot of the Blue Square table, and boss Liam Daish admits his struggling side were well beaten.

"We felt sorry for ourselves after going 2-1 down so soon after half-

time. "We needed to show more character than we did. We gave them too much of a helping hand."