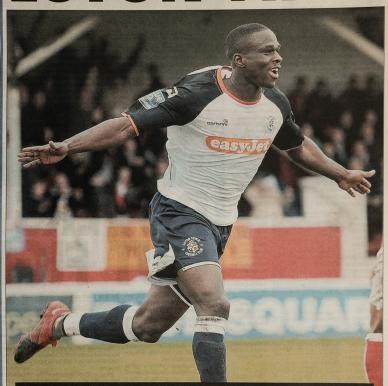
LUTON FIRE



SUPERSONIC HATTERS READY FOR A RIDE

NOW that's what you call a Gnakp hand! Nearly a year on from Wembley and Luton's epic Johnstone's Paint

Claude Gnakpa's

Trophy triumph, the man that salvaged something special from their damaging season struck again

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 Gnakpainspired 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-

overcome Eurostar

Stevenage and

with supersonic speed

But nobody can form side kept the heat soaring.
A forgettable first half was washed away effortlessly by rampant Town. Easylet had

ignore a fifth win in favourable fixture list. Hold on to your hats. folks. This roller-coaster ride of a season has some sharp corners to navigate vet.

Oxford will, of course.

still fancy their chances of taking top

MITH SIX OFTHE BEST

Gnakpa hat-trick hots up title race





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

JUST when we

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 Gnakpa'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 gone full circle. A quick throw from Ed



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

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

Dangerous Moses Ashikodi tried Cronin got a good similar a few moments after. The result on a big day of international rugby was more Stade de France just days after the 34than Stonebridge Road.

The Hatters then hit the selfdestruct 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 on composure in the box.

And then came a moment to give manager Money nightmares. Defender Janos Kovacs over-hit a trickling 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 Gnakpa and the mid-

fielder gave Cronin no chance. Within two minutes, the game had

and the veteran front-EBBSFLEET V LUTON

England C keeper hand to it but Gallen wasn't to be denied year-old ex-QPR front man scored twice to help beat O RED CARDS C Kidderminster 3-1.

It should have been game over just before the hour ENTERTAINMENT: ****
mark. Gnakpa, REF RATING: ROB Whitton 8/10 keeping his balance, dinked a beautiful ball to the unmarked Craddock, but the striker hallooned his shot

miles over.
Fleet were dumbstruck, bewildered by the wave Gore, Hall, Newton 1986.

after wave of

attacks coming their way. Craddock wasn't to be stopped, time. though. Jake Howells' left-wing cross keeper's reach for his fifth goal in his much of a helping hand."

last five matches. **MATCH STATS**

3 SHOTS OFF TARGET

14 FOULS CONCEDED 15

STAR MAN: Claude Gnakpa

(Luton) ATT: 1,923

A rout from then on was always coming. Gnakpa placed a perfect header for 4-1 before finally getting his hands on the match ball seconds after as 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.

EBBSFLEET: 4-4-2: Cronin 6, Heeroo 6, Crooks 6, Charles 6, Collins 5, Stavrinou 6 (Welsh 79 5), Shakes 6, Holmes 5, Balley I Ashikodi 7, Vieira 7 (Ginty 79, 5) Subs not used: Salmon, West, Hill The result leaves Ebbsfleet deep in trouble at the foot of the Blue LUTON: 4-4-2: Tyler 6, Asafu-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-

"We needed to show more charwas finished expertly out of the goal- acter than we did. We gave them too

HE'S GOT THE GNAKP: Claude Gnakpa celebrates the second of his three goals at Stonebridge Road

PICTURES: Gareth Owen