



GOOD START: Claude Gnaka's flying header gets Town rolling

Town keep the pressure on with 'title showdown' next

LUTON TOWN 4
Gnaka 35, Craddock 43, Howells 54, Heslop 74

SALISBURY CITY 0

Blue Square Premier
KENILWORTH ROAD

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FORGET Arsenal versus Barcelona tonight – this was champagne football Luton style.

Jake Howells cast himself in the Lionel Messi mode, pulling all the strings and scoring the third as Hatters overcame an opening half an hour where Salisbury came to spoil.

On the other wing Claude Gnaka was almost as devastating with his Argentinean impression.

It was his outrageous header from distance – his sixth goal in three games – that settled the nerves and made sure Luton go to leaders Stevenage on Saturday for a match that could be key in deciding who wins the Conference, despite their 1-0 win against Oxford.

Manager Richard Money said afterwards: "In my humble opinion this performance was better than Saturday, and it could have been the same scoreline."

Tom Craddock and Simon Heslop added the other two for their seventh win in a row in a game that could easily have been as big a rout as Town's previous two wins. What the Whites did in this match simply didn't matter.

There was just one change from the 8-0 thumping Luton dished out to Hayes & Yeading as Shane Blackett replaced Janos Kovacs in defence. The big Hungarian did not even make the bench, as with nine bookings he was being protected for the weekend's top-of-the-table clash.

Town spent much of the opening stages with the ball but it was City who carved the first opportunity with Chris Flood getting the better of Ed Asafu-Adjaye to cross to Matthew Tubbs before Freddie Murray cleared as the ball dribbled to the goal line.

The greater incisiveness was with Luton though as time and again Gnaka, in the form of his Hatters career, beat all comers for speed in

dashes to the by-line. But with Salisbury wanting to waste time early on with defensive set pieces it's a wonder the referee didn't add time on in the pre-match warm up.

After the goal fest of the last two outings it was all becoming a bit frustrating, not helped by the complete vacuum of atmosphere due to the 45-'strong', turnout of City supporters.

It was evidence and reason number one – other than the blindly obvious – as to why Luton must find their way out of the division, and perhaps a decent shout for the introduction of a fit and proper fans test.

The malaise was not helped as Craddock missed a sitter when, stood dead centre of the goal a couple of yards out, he conspired to head Keith Keane's corner wide.

Nevertheless the Teessider looked ravenous in his hunger to score his 17th league goal of the season, and a trademark run and shot was too well struck and straight into the grasp of keeper Ryan Pryce.

A minute later though Gnaka rose to score the most sublime of looping headers from the edge of the area that took a glorious age to descend in off the bar.

Salisbury were on the rack and no sooner had the Frenchman demonstrated how it's done than Craddock squandered a second dead cert, heading over at the back stick from Howells' cross.

To Town's disgust the young provider was then booked for diving when all around him were convinced he'd been hacked down in the area.

It was reason number two why Luton must win promotion – to avoid pedantic, sub-standard men in black. Mr Merchant even ordered the restart of the second half kick-off for a toe's worth of encroachment in the centre circle!

Before that though Craddock finally got the goal his endeavour had deserved and made sure Luton doubled their lead going into the break, although he tried his best to miss that too. Murray tripped in a scalpel-like cross and with an open goal the striker's heart would have been in his mouth as the ball cannoned in off the upright.

Five minutes into the restart the Whites, keeper produced an instinctive stop on his line to deny Gallen's header



NO PENALTY: Jake Howells picked up a booking for diving after this challenge

from almost point blank range.

But it was his blunder in chasing Craddock for a 50/50 ball outside his box soon after that led to the third. The striker wouldn't let the play die and won the ball before squaring to Howells who hammered home.

It was the teenager's last major contribution before being replaced by Adam Newton to rapturous applause from Kenilworth Road.

But he was still on the pitch when Heslop scored his first goal for the club and the club's 18th in three games, sliding in at the far post after good work from Craddock and Gallen.

LUTON TOWN: Tyler, Asafu-Adjaye, Keane, Pickett, Craddock, Blackett, Howells (Newton, 75), Gnaka (Nelthorpe, 80), Gallen (Hatch, 76), Murray, Heslop
Subs: Hall, Barnes-Horner
Referee: R Merchant
Attendance: 6,692 (45)

Harrier in a hurry for Luton to get promotion

LUTON are good enough to go up and then challenge for League Two promotion next season – that is the view of Town's latest signing Gavin Caines.

The 26-year-old centre half signed on loan from Kidderminster Harriers on Thursday and said he has immediately felt the feel-good factor around the club which suggests the Hatters are a team on the up.

"We are in this league at the moment and it's probably one of the biggest in the league," he said. "We are looking to go up and I think, if we get promotion, we'd be looking to do well next year as well. This is a big club and bigger than a lot of those in the league above."

The Birmingham-born defender said there is an expectation that Luton will gain promotion and the prospect of either an automatic return or a play-off final at Wembley was big draw to leave Aggborough. "I asked Steve Burr (Harriers boss) if I could come and at

first he didn't want to let me leave but I expressed that I wanted to come here and play in a team that are fighting to get promoted and looking to win the league," he said.

"I think the lads are looking at automatic promotion. But the play-offs are always exciting times for everyone and we'd fancy our chances."

"The team is on a good run and it's usually those that go up. To play at Wembley was a draw for me to come here as well."

Town travel to Stevenage on Saturday for a crunch clash that could play a factor in the destination of the Conference championship. Caines has been at the wrong end of a 5-1 Borough hiding in the FA Trophy first leg recently but still believes they are their for the taking with his new club.

"They're (Stevenage) are a good team but there's nothing for us to fear," he said. "They're top of the league at the moment but they're there to be caught and we're looking to hunt them down."

HEADS UP: Gavin Caines goes up against Tom Craddock when the Hatters played Kidderminster earlier this season



BLUE SQUARE PREMIER TABLE

		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
1	Stevenage	37	14	5	0	41	10	31	47
2	Luton	34	12	2	5	42	19	23	38
3	Oxford Utd	37	13	3	2	30	10	20	41
4	RB Osnabrück	38	11	4	4	36	19	17	36
5	York	33	10	6	2	29	13	16	31
6	Kettering	39	5	6	8	21	21	0	21
7	APC Wrexham	37	8	5	6	30	13	17	23
8	Warrington	38	8	7	3	28	15	13	31
9	Grimsby Town	37	12	3	5	30	24	6	39
10	Kidderminster	36	11	2	6	29	10	19	35
11	Altrincham	37	6	7	5	26	19	7	25
12	Cambridge Utd	38	4	7	3	21	23	-2	19
13	Widnes	38	6	5	26	16	3	-10	21
14	Widnes	38	6	5	21	22	5	-11	23
15	Hayes & Yeading	37	6	5	7	30	33	-3	23
16	Barnes	35	5	5	22	27	5	-2	20
17	Salisbury	37	5	6	18	17	9	-11	24
18	Turner	36	5	8	19	25	2	-17	23
19	Gateshead	36	3	7	21	20	3	-14	22
20	Eastbourne B	36	5	7	21	20	3	-14	22
21	Forest Green	37	5	7	20	25	3	-12	22
22	Exeter City	36	5	11	20	34	4	-11	20
23	Grays Athletic	36	3	4	12	14	38	-24	16



HOWELLS THAT: But made up for his caution with this thumping effort