

Barnes-Homer beauty buries Boro to narrow Conference title chase



BLUE SQUARE PREMIER
STEVENAGE BOROUGH 0
LUTON TOWN 1

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THE balance of Blue Square Premier power swung for a short time from Hertfordshire back to Bedfordshire on Sunday as Hatters cut Boro's lead at the top to two points through substitute Matthew Barnes-Homer's second half strike.

Anything but three points at Broadhall Way would have handed FA Trophy finalists Borough an unassailable lead at the summit, especially after they saw off rivals Oxford United in midweek.

But Town stuttered early on and were fortunate to go in level at the break. Stevenage's lofty XI made Luton look like midgets and, coupled with a dreadful playing surface, Hatters seemed to be struggling under the weight of expectation.

The home side went close several times and had the ball in the back of the net midway through the half only for the linesman's flag to rule out Tim Silby's effort for offside.

The tackles were flying in on the pitch as you'd expect from any top-of-the-table derby, but off the pitch was just as interesting. Both benches were bickering throughout the game and Luton had particular cause for complaint when Boro appeared to instigate a 'time out' after a player went down injured and the rest of the team ran over to manager Graham Westley for an impromptu team talk.

Luton's own half time debrief saw a change of personnel that proved crucial. Twenty four goals in the previous seven games had catapulted Town up the division, yet it was the reserve strikers Barnes-Homer and Liam Hatch that galvanised the Hatters when they were brought on.

Hatch's height was used to full effect, both in attack and defence late on, and his persistence in the box made the breakthrough on 55 minutes.

A throw in should have been cleared by Boro defender Michael Bostwick but he missed it under Hatch's pressure and the ball bobbled to Barnes-Homer who smashed it past keeper Chris Day (pictured above).

The remaining minutes called for some heroic defending as well as some luck as Stevenage threw everything at Luton but Richard Money's men held out.