

Tom strikes to trigger slow-starting Town

Luton Town 6 (4) Grays Athletic 0 (0)

HOTSHOT strikers Kevin Gallen and Tom Craddock maintained their phenomenal form with five goals between them in the 6-0 demolition of already-relegated Grays Athletic at Kenilworth Road on Easter Monday, writes Mark Wood.

Substitute striker Liam Hatch netted the sixth, but Craddock admitted the Hatters hadn't made the start they wanted to.

He said: "We wanted to come out of the blocks racing because we did against Hayes, but it wasn't quite like that and they did well the first half an hour.

"After that we looked quite comfortable. Once that first went in it settled everyone down a little bit and we started playing like we have done the last eight or nine games."

Rampant Town put in another stellar performance and, but for the woodwork, the linesman's flag and several missed chances, it could have been many more as the Hatters made it nine straight wins and 28 goals in six matches.

Grays Athletic may still not have won away since Boxing Day 2008, but they competed well before Craddock broke the deadlock.

Before that, Claude Gnaka had a point-blank header from Jake Howells' pinpoint cross well saved by Glyn Garner on 16 minutes.

Simon Heslop then went close when his thunderbolt thudded into the acres of empty seating behind the goal and Gallen then

looped a weak head into Garner's grateful clutches after a long punt down the middle.

Keith Keane flashed just wide on 27 minutes before Craddock fired well wide following another swashbuckling Town move four minutes later.

However, the breakthrough finally came on 32 minutes. Heslop's deflected cross looped towards the front post and Craddock nipped in first to head past the stranded Garner.

A terrible piece of refereeing then denied Howells a wonderful goal.

The lively winger robbed Kenny Davis on the halfway line before powering towards goal. Shrugging off several challenges he wove his way into the box before burying from a tight angle, only to find referee C Berry had already blown for a free-kick 10 yards outside the box.

Having booked the Grays right-back, the official's blushes were spared when Keane teed up Gallen from the free-kick and he smashed an unstoppable 25-yard strike into the top left-hand corner.

Luton's third arrived with four minutes of the half left, when a long ball over the top was brilliantly controlled by Craddock, who skipped past Garner before unselfishly squaring for Gallen to fire home from seven yards out.

Craddock said: "I took it around the keeper but I saw someone coming behind me and I knew there wasn't much time and there were two on the line and I wasn't sure I could squeeze it in so I thought it

UNSELFISH: Tom Craddock rounds Glyn Garner before squaring for Gallen to score his second



was best to set up Gallen."

The same two were at it again moments later with Craddock setting Gallen up on the edge of the area, but this time he could only send a shot whistling just wide.

With a minute of the half left Keane's ball released Craddock on the left and he drove half the pitch, but got too close to the keeper and could only spear his effort wide.

But Town's fourth did arrive on the stroke of half time. Janos Kovacs' long ball forward was superbly knocked down by Howells for the onrushing Craddock who toe-poked in off the post past Garner.

After the break Town twice went close in a matter of seconds on 56 minutes. A powerful Gnaka run saw him square for Craddock at the far post, but Garner's foot turned away his effort.

Craddock then hooked the ball back into the box for Gnaka, but the Frenchman's firm header was straight at Garner.

Town's fifth arrived on 58 minutes as Gallen completed a well-deserved hat-trick. Keane whipped a corner into the back post and Gallen rose highest to head home from just a couple of yards out, before being withdrawn in place of Hatch moments later.

And Hatch went close when Ed Asafu-Adjaye looped a cross into

the target man at the back post but his header was well grasped by the flying Garner.

Fellow sub Matthew Barnes-Homer showed great endeavour to burst into the box, but Garner did well to spread himself low to block.

Substitute Craig Nelthorpe hit the post and Kovacs had a header ruled out for a foul, before a flowing Luton strike was then chalked off by the linesman's flag.

Heslop raced down the middle before slipping a lovely ball through to Barnes-Homer.

His shot was superbly saved one-handed by Garner and, although Gnaka was on hand to slot the loose ball home, the linesman's flag came to Athletic's aid.

Town didn't have long to wait for their sixth, though. Keane's cross was tailor-made for Hatch at the back post who placed a stooping header past the stranded Garner.

Luton continued to play some delightful football and a powerful cross-cum-shot from Gnaka had to be beaten away by Garner in the closing minutes.

And only the woodwork prevented Town from increasing their lead further in the second minute of stoppage time. Keane laid the ball across the edge of the box and Heslop's true strike rattled the bar.