



Gallen goals finally put end to hat-trick hoodoo

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IT is the stuff of pub quiz trivia - What professional striker has played in all the top five English divisions in a career spanning 15 years and never scored a hat-trick?

That was until Monday when after the 6-0 thrashing of basement boys Grays Athletic the press box was awash with stunned faces when Kevin Gallen announced he'd finally broken his duck to claim a match ball.

The 34-year-old made his professional debut for Queens Park Rangers in the Premier League curtain raiser to the 1994/95 season against Manchester United at Old Trafford. He has since played for Barnsley, Plymouth Albion and MK Dons before last season's loan to Kenilworth Road was made permanent under previous Luton boss Mick Harford. He raced to his treble inside the hour at Kenilworth Road with a sublime top corner missile, a tap in and a header. Striker partner Tom Craddock also grabbed a first half brace before they were both replaced and Liam Hatch's header provided the cherry on the cake. And it could have been double figures as Craig Neilthorpe and Simon Heslop both struck the woodwork and Claude Gnakpa saw two bullet headers expertly saved.

Gallen said: "I'm over the moon. I've been playing as a professional now for 15-and-a-half years. It's a long time. I made my debut in 1994 and I don't think Jake [Howells] was even born then, so it's a long time."

"I've got the ball signed by the lads. Some of the things are unprintable, something to do with being old."

"It's just great to still be playing for a great crowd and in a great atmosphere. I love playing and training so hopefully there'll be a few more before the end of the season."

Not even the striker could put a finger on why it's taken so long for him to fire three in a game.

"I've scored about 20 doubles and got close to a hat-trick so many times, but it's just never happened," he said.

"It's just the way it goes. I should have got one against Hayes & Yeading (in the 8-0 win) when a shot hit both posts



GALLEN'S REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL: One...

nd Jake put it in. I've never been so disappointed to see us score in my whole life!"

The hat-trick took his tally for the season to 17 but he was substituted seconds later with half an hour still to play and town 5-0 to the good.

He said: "It was a bit of a joke because Keane (Keith Keane) said, 'if you get a hat-trick, signal to the gaffer you want to come off'. I did it but I didn't think he'd take me off because I was only asking, I wanted to stay on."

"But we've got four good strikers here and we knew it might happen because before the game the gaffer said, 'give us 90 minutes in 60'. What would have happened if I stayed on for 90 minutes? ...Nothing probably."

His treble was his 130th club career goal and marked two score firsts as he claimed a rare header, in front of his two young daughters, Sofia and Siena, who were watching the dad at the first time.

"It was the first time my kids have come to watch me play so I might have to bring them to the next game and take them to 'arrmworth', he said, before joking: "I looked over at them when scored the third and they were just playing on their Nintendo DS."

"I think it's my first headed goal for about two-and-a-half years so it's something I need to improve on."

"It's 37 goals [between Craddock and himself] this season so

it's good going. Tom is on 20 goals so my aim is to get there too, though I'm not really bothered about competitions."

As for the title race Luton are now just two points behind league leaders Stevenage after they bounced back from the 1-0 defeat to Town with a 3-0 victory over AFC Wimbledon on Monday.

If Borough keep winning then it will be the play-offs for Luton, but Gallen wouldn't be too disappointed with a chance to reach Wembley - and he hopes they can break the club's consecutive win record in doing so.

"It's Stevenage's to lose," he said. "We'll just keep doing what we do and win our matches and see what happens."

"Other than the extra two weeks, I'd take Wembley, but I don't think my missus will be too keen."

"We've got to keep going, show the same desire and hopefully there might be a slip up by Stevenage. If it doesn't happen we've got to try and go into the play-offs on the back of a 13 game unbeaten run."

"Twelve is the record so it's a great incentive."

"If we go into the play-offs, I know everyone says it's a lottery, but I fancy our chances against anyone. This crowd will get on top of them and it would be buzzing."

"The way we are playing they will be more frightened of playing us than we would of them. We'll wait and see what happens but it's all to play for."

