

Hatters keep the

pressure on

BLUE SQUARE PREMIER

LUTON TOWN 6
Howells 29, 56, Craddock 32, 50, 77 (pen),
Allen 84

HISTON 3
Sparkes 69, Knight-Percival 84,
Southam 87

BY JAMES CUNLIFFE

OVER to you Stevenage.

The Hertfordshire league leaders may have one hand tightly gripped on the Conference title but Luton aren't about to let them traipse off to League Two without making them work for it.

Borough travel to Altrincham tonight knowing that two more wins will clinch it, but if it is to be the play-offs then Town are exhibiting the kind of flair that will have rivals worried.

A first senior hat-trick for Tom Craddock took his tally to 23 for the season and 13 goals in 11 games.

A brace for Jake Howells earned the youngster a deserved man-of-the-match award before a customary Kevin Gallen goal took him to 16 for the season, and never mind that Histon replied with three, this was very sexy football indeed.

And as manager Richard Money agreed: "The quality of our play going forward was of the highest order, high above this league, and that's not being disrespectful to anyone."

Luton made two changes from the side that drew at Tamworth on Saturday with Kevin Gallen returning for Liam Hatch and Adam Newton replacing Claude Gnaka.

Town started slowly and there was certainly a lack of thrust with the Frenchman missing, though Ed Asafo-Adje was providing some useful support and some dangerous in-swingers to boot.

But it was on the other flank that Luton were cutting holes in the Histon defence. Freddie Murray, Tom Craddock and Jake Howells were quick and incisive with their willingness to get forward, even if in the early stages the neat moves weren't quite coming off.

But Luton were so dominant in the middle of the park and in the tackle - thanks to Simon Heslop and the imperious Keith Keane - that it only seemed a matter of time before Histon began to get giddy with the swarm of orange shirts buzzing around them.

The lead should have been established on 16 minutes when Barnsley loan midfielder Heslop floated a cross to Newton who expertly chested down on the penalty spot but could only stab the ball straight at the onrushing Histon keeper David Knight.

From that moment the Hatters camped out in the Blue Square strugglers' half and Howells was beneficiary of a loose ball on the edge of the box that he struck with venom but again straight at the Stutes' stopper.

Just before the half hour breakthrough came when Craddock fed in Howells who stroked home nonchalantly to emphasise his own ability as every inch that of Football League material.

One soon turned to two and it was all the work of Keane who broke up the play on the halfway line and set Craddock free on a one-man counter attack mission. When the Teessider reached the edge of the box he cut inside and fired low past Knight.



SIX OF THE BEST: Tom Craddock, left, joins in the celebrations as Kevin Gallen collects Luton's final goal of the evening

But for the Histon stopper it could have been even more and he made his third save of the half, one minute from the break when Gallen lashed a close range volley at him for him to block instinctively.

Five minutes into the second half and a desperately short backpass from Histon centre back Adam Tann let Craddock in, and with Knight stranded the hitman stroked the ball confidently home.

Some of Town's movement around the visitors' penalty area was electrifying as they pulled off flicks and tricks that spun Histon in circles.

Even Mark Tyler and Asafo-Adje were getting in on the showboating action. And when the latter jinked passed Lee Smith on 56 minutes and picked out Craddock six yards out the sensible money should have been on the striker to rock away his third.

However his header was rather tame and Knight, for the fourth time, only had to stand still to block. Unluckily for the keeper Howells was lurking and he found the bottom corner to claim a brace for himself.

Irony of fate went up from the Town faithful when Histon pulled one back on 69 minutes through Daniel Sparkes - but

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL: Tom Craddock collects the match ball and is congratulated by Histon keeper Nathaniel Knight



it did little to spoil their fun as they chanted for Money to wave at them (he did), and sang, "The Town are going up!" There was slightly more concern five minutes later when Nathaniel Knight Percival poked home a second, but still there was the sense that the Hatters would just score more.

When Heslop was fouled in the area up stepped Craddock to send Knight the wrong way from the spot.

His strike partner Gallen made it yet another home six goal win five minutes from time when he squeezed a shot through the grasp of Knight.

Just as well because Glen Southam fired in a late top corner rasper to half the deficit, flattering the visitors.

LUTON TOWN: Tyler, Asafo-Adje, Keane, Pilkington, Newton (Barnes-Homer, 82), Craddock, Blackett, Howells, Gallen (Hatch, 88), Murray, Heslop
Subs not used: Kovacs, Jarvis, Nethorpe
Referee: Brendan Malone (Wiltshire)
Attendance: 7,083 (44)