

Altrincham park their bus to frustrate Luton

Luton Town 0 Altrincham 0

MIDFIELDER Asa Hall admitted he was "pleasantly surprised" to receive to nod that he was playing just prior to kick-off at Kenilworth Road on Saturday, *writes Carl Field.*

Hatters had originally gone with an unchanged line-up but, after Keith Keane felt his knee in the warm-up, Hall - originally named among the substitutes - was called in to replace him.

"I got the nod that I was playing with about a minute to go, I think," revealed Hall.

"I was just out there on the pitch with the other subs after the lads who were starting had all gone in.

"And then suddenly I heard a shout from (Alan) Neilson and I was in the team, so it was a bit of a shock really.

"It has been great watching them win, the lads have played some great stuff, at home especially, but it is frustrating being up in the stand or on the bench.

"I was surprised, but pleasantly surprised, to be playing.

"I want to play every game and it is maybe an extra special kick to get into the play-off team. Keane (Keith Keane) has been terrific all season but, if I'm needed, I'm there."

The Hatters went into the game knowing that, regardless of their result against Altrincham, Stevenage Borough would be crowned champions of the Blue Square Premier if they won their game at Kidderminster.

And that is exactly what happened and ultimately, being held to a goalless draw, the first time



A SEA OF STRIPES: There's no way through for Tom Craddock as Altrincham defend in depth. *Picture by Jane Russell*

that Town had failed to score at home since December 2, mattered little and they must now concentrate on trying to win promotion through the play-offs.

Hall was keen to grab the chance with both hands and flashed a 20-yard shot just wide inside two minutes, after being set up by veteran Kevin Gallen.

The hosts enjoyed plenty of the ball in the opening 45 minutes, but were just unable to unlock the door and get their goal.

Altrincham keeper Stuart

Coburn also played his part in keeping Town at bay.

First he produced an excellent reaction stop to deny Tom Craddock an opener on 37 minutes and then got down well to save Simon Heslop's low driving shot just before half time.

Into the second half and unsurprisingly it was Luton doing all of the pressing.

But they were being restricted to long range efforts and denied an opening by some dogged defending from Altrincham.

Needing a goal, manager Richard Money decided to go for broke just after the hour mark, taking off full-backs Ed Asafu-Adjaye and Freddie Murray and replacing them with strikers Liam Hatch and Matthew Barnes-Homer.

Now with four frontline forwards on the pitch, the Hatters continued to pour forward in search of a breakthrough, but were still being frustrated by the visitors.

Barnes-Homer was on the end of a slick Luton move on 74 minutes, but his ball across the face of goal failed to pick out a team mate.

Gallen had a glorious chance to win it on 83 minutes, following a flowing move involving Jake Howells and Barnes-Homer, but his shot from eight yards was brilliantly saved by Coburn.

Some six minutes of stoppage time came and went without a goal, before the Town players huddled in the centre circle, clearly focused on their play-off challenge.

Reflecting on a frustrating afternoon, Hall said: "It was very difficult to break them down, they had two big centre-backs who won practically everything but it was nice to be back out there.

"It was a hot day which made it difficult as well, but I thought we played some good stuff, we just couldn't get that goal.

"The pitch was very hard and bobbly but that's no excuse, because we train on a pitch similar, so all the lads are used to it. It would be nice if it was a bit better but that's what we have got to deal with."

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