



Hatters held as Rushden remain on right track

09/10



PICTURE: Mal Swinden

COOL FINISH: Tom Craddock opens the scoring for Luton

MATCH STATS

RUSHDEN v LUTON	
7 SHOTS ON TARGET	9
5 SHOTS OFF TARGET	9
3 CORNERS	5
2 OFFSIDE	1
7 FOULS CONCEDED	6
0 YELLOW CARDS	0
0 RED CARDS	0

STAR MAN: Curtis Osano

(Rushden)

ATT: 4,820

ENTERTAINMENT: ****

REF RATING: Nick Kinsley 8/10

RUSHDEN: 4-3-3: Roberts 7, Porter 7, Huke 8, Stuart 7, Osano 8, Plattison 6 (Akuranga 77, 6), Terry 7, Byrne 7 (Wollaston 56, 6), Smith 7, Louis 6, Tomlin 7 (Farrell 55, 7). Subs not used: Day, McDonald.

LUTON: 4-3-3: Tyler 7, Newton 7, Pilkington 7, Kovacs 7, Murray 6, Heslop 6 (Blackett 69, 6), Jarvis 7, Howells 7, Craddock 7 (Nwileke) 82, 6, Gallen 6 (Hall 82, 7), Barnes-Homer 5. Subs not used: Gore, Asadu-Ajayi.

By Chris Barritt

DIAMONDS assistant boss Michael Stone praised both promotion-chasing sides as the regular season ended in an exciting, end-to-end encounter at Nene Park.

"Credit to both teams for the way the game was played," Stone said. "We didn't want the regular season to fizzle out with a whimper and neither team wanted to enter the play-offs on the back of a defeat. A draw was a fair result today."

"The most important thing was for the team to come through the game injury-free and unscathed and that is what has happened."

This was certainly no end-of-season yawn as both teams went for the jugular from the start.

Luton started the better and got on the scoresheet as early as the eighth minute. Kevin Gallen fed Tom Craddock and the striker drew Dale Roberts before finding the left-hand corner of the net.

Seven minutes later it should have been 2-0 but Gallen missed a great opportunity from the edge of the area.

But against the run-of-play Diamonds equalised with their first shot of the game on 19 minutes. Sam Smith flicked on Paul Terry's cross and Mark Byrne nipped in to volley home.

This spurred Luton into action and the visitors squandered several good opportunities to go back in front. An unmarked Craddock failed to beat Roberts with only him to beat, while the same player saw a narrow angled shot rebound off the Diamonds goalkeeper.

Diamonds employed Curtis Osano in an unaccustomed left-back position and the youngster excelled throughout. On the half hour he produced a mazy 70-yard run before his left-foot shot was well saved by Mark Tyler.

Two minutes later Osano moved upfield again but was off target with a deflected shot.

The visitors had an excellent

chance to reclaim the lead shortly after half-time but Matthew Barnes-Homer saw his shot saved by Roberts after beating Shane Huke.

Diamonds almost snatched the lead on 55 minutes when Huke's cross from the left was met by substitute Craig Farrell but the striker hooked his shot over the bar.

Three minutes later, Luton keeper Mark Tyler made a superb save when he blocked Farrell's free-kick from the edge of the area.

The visitors laid siege to the Diamonds goal in the last 20 minutes

but just couldn't get the breakthrough. Asa Hall saw his 20-yard shot comfortably saved by Roberts before substitute Shane Blackett was wide with a header.

But Barnes-Homer was guilty of missing two gilt-edged chances in the last ten minutes, first blazing over from close range and then missing the target with a woeful shot.

After the game there was some concern for the safety of the fans when a contingent of Luton supporters came onto the field and

made their way towards the Diamonds stand. Fortunately any trouble was averted.

Luton manager Richard Money said: "Both teams felt the heat today but I am particularly glad that we finished the game so strongly. In the back of our minds we knew we might have to come back here on Thursday so we changed a few things team wise and spiced it up."

"I thought both teams would want to keep their form going into the play-offs and we certainly have."