

Lady Luck shines on Minstermen

York City 1 (0) Luton Town 0 (0)

A FRUSTRATING defeat for the Hatters was eased only by the knowledge that they had created so many chances against stuttering York City, writes Mark Wood.

The Minstermen may have gained the upper hand in the tie by winning Thursday night's first leg through Richard Brodie's 89th-minute winner, but in truth it was a game Luton largely dominated from start to finish.

It was cruel on the Hatters, especially on defender Shane Blackett – impeccable almost all night – whose mistake led to the goal.

On the outcome, industrious midfielder Keith Keane said: "Things like that happen. We played very well. To us it's still only half time and we still have 90 minutes to play.

"If we can come away and play like that and dominate like that it's got to give us confidence.

"You get frustrated, but you get more frustrated when you don't create chances. We just need the end product and hopefully that will come on Monday."

The Hatters created a wealth of chances throughout the 90 minutes, with Keane one of a number of Luton players to force a decent stop out of City keeper Michael Ingham, while winger Claude Gnaka was only denied by a post.

On his bouncing 30-yard effort, Keane continued: "It just fell and I took a pop at it and it was unlucky it didn't go in. It was a bit like that all night. It just didn't seem to go in. We felt we were the better team and it was a good game of football."

But Keane admitted he was delighted to finally be back in action after a brief spell on the sidelines through injury, adding: "I kept my fitness up and it was nice to get back playing."

This game was engrossing, entertaining and enthralling from the very start at a rain-soaked Bootham Crescent on Thursday night, and kick-off had to be put back 15 minutes because of crowd congestion.

Ed Asafu-Adjaye may have been missing with a knock, but Town were excellent throughout.

Early on, Gnaka pummeled under Luke Graham's tackle in the box, but his hopeful appeals for a pen-



SO CLOSE: Another chance goes begging

alty were turned down by referee Brendan Malone.

A wonderfully inviting Simon Heslop cross was flicked agonisingly wide off the far post by Tom Craddock on seven minutes and Town's patient build-up continued to create more chances than York's direct style.

City keeper Ingham was then forced into a sprawling stop to turn Keane's bouncing 30-yard effort round the post on 18 minutes, before a venomous Craddock strike was deflected just over by David McGurk after good work by the impressive Jake Howells on the left.

Minstermen danger man Brodie gave a warning of what was to come midway through the half when he almost caught Town with a sucker punch. He showed great strength to shrug off Freddie Murray as he burst into the box, but Blackett got back in the nick of time to produce a fantastic block.

More desperate Luton defending followed just after the half hour mark as York put their best move of the game together. Ben Purkiss and Michael Rankine combined to tee up Alex Lawless, but Adam Newton was in the right place at the right time to block his effort.

Lady Luck then raced to City's aid with nine minutes of the half left. In what looked like a move straight off the training ground, Keane's dangerous corner picked out Blackett in space at the front post.

His flick-on found Kevin Gallen lurking at the far post but his header was brilliantly saved by an Ingham foot and the rebound off Gallen's shoulder was turned past the post.

Town continued to turn the screw with the woodwork this time coming to York's rescue on 40 minutes.

Howells' bullocking run on the left was followed by a great early cross and Gnaka's touch squirmed past Ingham but hit a post.

A crisp Hatters move again cut York's back line to ribbons in stoppage time but Craddock could only thrash wide as the home side were lucky to go into the break on level terms.

The second half continued in the same vein, with York's strikers increasingly isolated.

Another training ground corner routine saw Luton go close two minutes in, but Gallen's first-time effort was straight into Ingham's midriff.

Mark Tyler had to scramble Graham's header away at the other end, before Brodie nodded straight at the Luton stopper.

Another gilt-edged chance for Luton went begging on 56 minutes. Craddock turned his man inside the box but Gnaka could only stab his cross-cum-shot over the bar.

The game finished in end-to-end fashion. Unmarked Chris Carruthers spooned an effort over the bar at the far post when he should have scored, while George Pilkington bravely blocked a James Meredith drive with five minutes to go.

Craddock was just unable to connect with substitute Matthew Barnes-Homer's dangerous cross before York grabbed an undeserved lead with a minute left.

Blackett couldn't deal properly with a ball over the top and his weak defensive header allowed top scorer Brodie to gallop through and fire past the exposed Tyler.