

Town are left stumped by second half York-er

Luton Town 0 (0) York City 1 (0), aggregate Luton Town 0 York City 2

DEFEAT to York City in the play-off semi-finals will take some time to sink in according to Hatters skipper George Pilkington, writes Mark Wood.

The bitter sting of defeat on Monday was hard to take for the 28-year-old centre-half, who felt Town had performed well over the two legs.

Trailing 1-0 from the first leg on Thursday night, the Hatters never got into their swing on Monday as Chris Carruthers' second half strike knocked the stuffing out of Luton – a blow from which they never recovered.

And Luton's misery was compounded at the death as Adam Newton was dismissed for two bookable offences in a matter of seconds.

Pilkington said: "It's very, very disappointing. For a couple of weeks it won't sink in. The season is over now but it doesn't feel that way and it's as if we still have something to play for.

"Over the two legs we played well at their place and I feel we did that again today."

But he praised the way the Minstermen had played, especially defensively.

Pilkington continued: "Full credit to York. They were solid up at their place and we were maybe unfortunate not to score at their place and then here.

"We had very long periods of possession but they've made it difficult for us and we haven't got in behind them.

"They snuffed out the couple of half chances we had during the 90 minutes and it wasn't to be.

"Full credit to their back four. They didn't make it easy for Kevin Gallen and Tommy Craddock. They've kept them quiet to be fair and full credit to them.

"Chances were few and far between. They've been outstanding all season. We've had one or two chances and put a lot of pressure on them but it's do or die.

"They got their midfield in and their left-back did excellently against Claude Gnaka. Sometimes you just have to hold your hands up and say they deserved it.

"We've played them four times and they've come out on top over the season.

"You look at the four teams in there (the play-offs) and it's all much of a muckness and it was going to be fine details on the day

DEFEAT at York in the first leg was key to Town's play-off semi-final defeat according to boss Richard Money.

The disappointed Hatters manager said: "I think the way that both games went meant it was difficult for us.

"I couldn't say too much after the last game but I genuinely felt we needed to win at York to change the whole complex of the game.



NO WAY THROUGH: Town fail to break down the York defence

that was going to decide the tie."

And he was left to rue his luck that led to the Minstermen's win.

He continued: "It came from my free-kick and I'm disappointed. It's a bit frustrating really because I followed up and cleared it and hit the lad and it's gone into the net. Maybe they just had that little break when they needed it.

"I'm just disappointed for the fans really and the ones that I spoke to coming off the field said keep your head up and that means a lot."

And he added: "There's always ifs and buts like if we had kept a clean sheet. Sometimes it just doesn't go for you.

"It's football. Throughout the course of the season there are a lot of ups and downs."

Resilient City stifled the Hatters throughout at a jam-packed Kenilworth Road.

Craddock forced a low stop from Michael Ingham in the opening seconds while Alex Lawless drove straight at Mark Tyler.

Luton tried to play the better football and a fine Simon Heslop pass put Craddock into space on 14 minutes, but he could only drag an effort wide when he should at least have hit the target.

The hosts' best chance of the game then went begging on 22 minutes. Twinkletoes Gallen and Craddock combined brilliantly in the box, but the veteran striker's

side-footed effort was pushed aside by Ingham.

York danger man Richard Brodie had a long-range curler well saved by Tyler moments later, while Gnaka's flick from a Keith Keane free-kick was just wide after the half-hour mark.

Craddock fashioned a shooting opportunity for Jake Howells with four minutes of the half left, but his drive was well blocked.

And right on the stroke of half-time Brodie almost broke the deadlock when a lovely run took him past Freddie Murray and Shane Blackett in the area before Tyler saved from a narrow angle.

The Minstermen then all but sealed victory in the opening moments of the second half. Pilkington's errant challenge on Carruthers in the first 15 seconds gave the visitors a dangerous free-kick on the edge of the box. Tyler couldn't hold Michael Rankine's fierce free-kick and Pilkington's clearance rebounded off Carruthers and into the net.

Lawless flashed two efforts wide of the mark, while manager Richard Money rolled the changes, eventually bringing on Liam Hatch, Matthew Barnes-Homer and Asa Hall.

A looping Hatch header from a Keane corner was turned behind, before the target man had a header easily saved by Ingham from a deep Newton centre.

An injury to referee R Lewis

and allowed them to park the bus and they looked good on the counter-attack.

"Losing the goal after half time made it doubly difficult.

"We are obviously disappointed. The players are disappointed.

"They feel they haven't done enough today to break down a tough defence.

"We all feel that we should have arguably won the game at York."

forced him from the field on 67 minutes and he was replaced in the middle by fourth official C Berry, but it made little difference as the game slipped away from the Hatters.

Pilkington was spared an own goal when Newton cleared off the line from a corner with 16 minutes left, before Craddock was thwarted.

Hall's superb first-time pass put Craddock away with 13 minutes left and, just as it looked like he would be left one-on-one with Ingham, David McGurk got back to put in a great challenge as Craddock was about to pull the trigger.

Hall skewed a well-placed free-kick wastefully wide before Craddock twice went close.

Barnes-Homer's slide-rule pass put Craddock away but his powder-puff shot was deflected behind and the former Middlesbrough man then skewed wide as he looked to create room in the box.

Five minutes of injury time was added but it was never going to be enough.

Gnaka hooked wide in injury time before things went from bad to worse when Newton was dismissed for slamming the ball into the hoardings and one yellow quickly followed the other for dissent.

A pitch invasion followed at the end and some ugly scenes ensued as police desperately tried to keep the two sets of fans apart.

And he admitted that his side had found it difficult to break the organised Minstermen down.

Money added: "There was a lot of bodies to play through, that's the top and bottom of it.

"We just needed something to hang our hats on to really. We were chasing it all day long really. We needed to get in front to lift ourselves and lift the crowd."

Money talks...

"It gave them something to hold on to and gave them the chance to come here and be as strong and as well organised as they can be.

"They defended with their lives and we've conceded early in the second half