

Nice and three-sy for Barnes-Homer

Blue Square Premier
Kettering Town 1 (1)
Luton Town 3 (1)

A BRILLIANT hat-trick from red-hot striker Matthew Barnes-Homer inspired the Hatters to the top of the table after a 3-1 victory at nine-man Kettering Town last night.

The Poppies simply couldn't handle the born-again hitman as he ran riot at Rockingham Road, where Hatters' supporters outnumbered the home faithful.

Twice he netted from the spot and once from open play as both Kettering scorer Iysekend Christie and ex-Hatter Ian Roper were sent off for two bookable offences.

The Hatters made two changes to the team that beat Altrincham 2-1 on Saturday, with Kevin Pilkington coming in between the sticks for Mark Tyler and Claude Gnaka replacing Jake Howells.

Kettering, meanwhile, named three former Hatters in their XI with Nathan Abbey, Roper and Sol Davis all starting for the home side.

A surging run from James Dance took him past Keith Keane on 14 minutes but his low effort was straight at Kevin Pilkington.

Luton responded immediately with Andy Drury and Freddie Murray linking well on the left to create a chance for Barnes-Homer, but the former Kidderminster man could only fire over.

Tackles started to fly in and more than once they carried an added bit of needle as the game finally developed a bit of an edge.

But the Hatters snatched the lead from the penalty spot midway through the half.

Kevin Gallen just beat ex-Hatter Roper to Dan Gleeson's clever

by Mark Wood

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pass and referee M Heywood had no hesitation in pointing to the spot, with last man Roper perhaps lucky to escape with just a yellow card for his clumsy challenge.

In-form Barnes-Homer then stepped up to slam the 25th-minute penalty down the middle as former Town stopper Abbey dived the wrong way.

It didn't take too long for Kettering to hit back though as on 32 minutes, a dangerous corner saw Christie allowed all the room in the world to plant his header home.

Undeterred the Hatters continued to press. Drury went down in the box but nothing was doing before Barnes-Homer missed a gilt-edged opportunity seconds later.

Gallen's pass then set Gnaka free on the right but Barnes-Homer could only side-foot over from inside the six yard box.

After the break, Town should have been ahead just 40 seconds into the second half but Drury curled wastefully wide from the edge of the box.

Luton were playing all of the football and again should have retaken the lead on 52 minutes. Drury was once more the provider but Barnes-Homer powered his header off target.

Zdenek Kroca was being given a torrid time by Christie on his first real taste of the cut and thrust of Conference football.

And Christie had the ball in the net again on 67 minutes, but the linesman's flag had been up for a couple of seconds before the ball trickled in.

Pictures by Gareth Owen

ON THE SPOT: Matthew Barnes-Homer scores at Kettering on Tuesday night after Kevin Gallen was tripped (inset)



The game then swung in Luton's direction with 20 minutes to go when Christie fouled Kroca in the corner and received his second yellow card and, with it, his marching orders.

Forty-one-year-old Poppies assistant boss and former Hatter Paul Furlong came on as a 72nd minute sub but seconds later Luton were ahead.

A flowing move saw substitute Danny Crow release Barnes-Homer who, in turn, picked out Drury

in space on the edge of the box.

Abbey could only parry his pile-driver and Barnes-Homer was on hand to ram the rebound into the roof of the net.

Replacement Jake Howells then saw his fierce drive deflected into the grateful grasp of Abbey as the Hatters looked to kill the game off.

And they duly did just that with seven minutes left. Great interplay between Barnes-Homer and Crow saw the substitute burst into the

Poppies (4-4-2): Nathan Abbey, Luke Graham, Sol Davis, Ashley Westwood (C), Ian Roper, Andre Boucaud (Brett Solihon 86), Jean-Paul Marna (Paul Furlong 72), James Dance, Serge Makoko, Iysekend Christie, Patrick Noubissile. **Substitutes not used:** Niall Cooper, Greg Taylor, Darren Wrack.

Hatters (4-4-2): Kevin Pilkington, Dan Gleeson, Freddie Murray, Keith Keane, George Pilkington (C), Matthew Barnes-Homer, Andy Drury, Zdenek Kroca, Adam Murray (Pavel Besta 86), Claude Gnaka (Jake Howells 66), Kevin Gallen (Danny Crow 65). **Substitutes not used:** Mark Tyler, Adam Newton.

Referee: M Heywood.
Assistant referees: E Smart and G Taylor.

Fourth official: R Patterson.
Booked: Roper 24, Christie 39, A Murray 60, Christie 70, Roper 83, Abbey 85, Westwood 88, Barnes-Homer 88.

Sent-off: Christie 70, Roper 83.
Attendance: 2,906 (Hatters 1,664).

Star Hatter: Matthew Barnes-Homer - is quickly turning into the real deal.

box and tumble over another Luton player. Again the referee pointed to the spot and Roper saw red for his second booking.

Barnes-Homer stepped up and he buried his hat-trick strike home into the bottom right-hand corner as the packed away end went ballistic.

Luton even had the luxury of bringing on Czech import Pavl Besta for his debut as they bossed the final stages to coast to the second win of the season.