

Teams

Poppies (4-3-3)	6
Nathan Abbey	.....
Given little chance by all three	.....
Ashley Westwood	.....
Had a tough time with Drury	.....
Luke Graham	.....
Another decent display	.....
Ian Roper	.....
Out of luck with decisions	.....
Sol Davis	.....
Did a great job on Gnaka	.....
Patrick Noubissie	.....
Did his role impressively	.....
James Dance	.....
Really got around pitch	.....
Andre Boucaud	.....
Quiet again unfortunately	.....
Serge Makou	.....
Showed real bursts of pace	.....
Iysden Christie	.....
A good night ended controversially	.....
Jean-Paul Marna	.....
Tried hard but still not fit	.....
Substitutes	.....

Furlong (for Marna, 72 mins)
Solomon (for Boucaud, 86 mins)
Not used: Taylor, Wrack, Cooper

Luton (4-4-2): Pilkington,
Gleeson, G Pilkington, Kroca,
F Murray; Gnaka (sub Howells, 65 mins),
Keane (sub Besta, 86 mins),
A Murray, Drury, Barnes-Homer,
Gallen (sub Crow, 65 mins). Subs
not used: Newton, Tyler.

Goals

24 mins: Barnes-Homer pen.	0-1
32 mins: Christie	1-1
74 mins: Barnes-Homer	1-2
84 mins: Barnes-Homer pen.	1-3

Cards

Roper (brought down Gallen)...	Y
Christie (deliberate handball)...	Y
A Murray (blocked Makou)...	Y
Christie (foul on Kroca)...	R
Roper (brought down Crow) R	
Abbey (kicking ball away).....	Y

Referee

M Heywood

Match stats

	KT	LT
Attempts on	2	6
Attempts off	2	7
Blocked	1	2
Corners	2	2
Caught offside	2	5
Fouls conceded	12	10
Attendance: 2,906		
Away fans: 1,664		

Match verdict

Sometimes the referee has to take the blame. Mark Heywood handed Luton Town two very dubious penalties and Iysden Christie and Ian Roper were both harshly sent off. The Hatters were good but Kettering didn't get what they deserved.

Star man

There were a couple of impressive displays or the Poppies in a new look formation. Patrick Noubissie was probably the pick as, for the most part, he broke up play well in front of the back four.

Who's next?

It's the big return on Saturday. Former Kettering Town manager Mark Cooper brings his new team, Darlington, to Rockingham Road.

Poppies feel aggrieved at such a harsh defeat

with Jon Dunham



■ CLOSE CONTROL – Jean-Paul Marna maintains possession under pressure from Fred Murray while Iysden Christie celebrates his first-half equaliser

Pictures by Mike Capps

FOOTBALL can be cruel at times and Kettering Town would be well in their rights to have a moan or two as the title favourites triumphed at the Elgodd's Arena.

It's fair to say referee Mark Heywood won't be on the Poppies' Christmas card list this year after he awarded two dubious penalties and red cards to end their hopes against Luton Town.

Matthew Barnes-Homer was the main beneficiary as his hat-trick sealed a second successive win but there was far too much controversy in the air once the final whistle had been blown.

Ian Roper saw red for two bookings, both of which came for the penalty incidents.

He clearly won the ball when Kevin Gallen tumbled over his challenge after 24 minutes as Barnes-Homer opened the scoring from 12 yards.

And, with six minutes to go and the hosts already 2-1 up, Danny Crow went flying with Roper close by. Contact looked minimal but Mr Heywood was in no doubt.

What made things even worse was that, with the game poised at 1-1, Iysden Christie – who had earlier levelled for the hosts – was also sent off.

His straight red card, for a barge on Zdenek Kroca, was dubious. There's always a question or two about when the referee is blamed for a defeat.

But the sending-off of Christie knocked the stuffing out of the spirited Poppies and Patrick Noubissie rubbed the salt into the wounds.

Kettering had been far from

outclassed up until Christie saw red and, while Luton did have the majority of possession, Lee Harper's side were well in the game.

The Poppies boss was as good as his word when he had said he would try to go for a win against the Hatters as he lined his side up in an adventurous 4-3-3 formation.

The likes of Patrick Noubissie, in the holding midfield role, and new signing Serge Makou, on the left side of an attacking trio took to their positions while James Dance revelled in a box-to-box display.

The overall performance was far-and-away better than the 0-0 draw at Gateshead.

But they found a more-than-useful Luton side in unforfeiting mood as they made the most of their numerical advantage.

Barnes-Homer hammered home his first penalty but Christie headed home when he was left unmarked from Dance's corner.

Barnes-Homer missed a couple of excellent chances before the Poppies' goalscorer, who had a header ruled out for offside, saw red but there was no chance he could miss two minutes after that when he fired home the rebound after Nathan Abbey had saved well from Andy Drury.

Mr Heywood's final act was to award that second ridiculous penalty – and Barnes-Homer made no mistake again.

Harper had to be restrained as he confronted the official on the pitch after the game.

To be honest, he had every right to complain.

Harper unhappy with ref's performance



LEE HARPER slammed referee Mark Heywood after he watched his Kettering Town side slip to a controversial defeat to Luton Town.

The official awarded the Hatters two dubious penalties and also handed red cards to both Iysden Christie and Ian Roper – the latter's for the two spot-kick decisions – as Matthew Barnes-Homer's hat-trick sealed the visitors' 3-1 win.

Christie had brought the Poppies level with a header in the first half as the hosts performed well in a new 4-3-3 formation.

And boss Harper wasted little time in blasting Mr Heywood for his effort.

"The referee's decisions have cost us the game, there's

no doubt about it," he said.

"The first one looked like it was a penalty. I know there were some people who thought Roper got some of the ball.

"But I was more upset with the way it came about because there was a great tackle from Pat Noubissie that was given as a foul and it all came from that free-kick.

"The second one definitely isn't a penalty because the ball has gone off in the direction that Roper was running at. The crowd went up and the referee sent him off. It was just weak.

"I am extremely disappointed because the referee gave us nothing all evening.

"We are absolutely gutted because, with a new system,

we were pleased with how we played prior to Iysden Christie being sent-off.

"We were arguably the better team and Iysden has also had a goal disallowed and I wasn't sure if that was offside.

"I felt that we were playing well in the second half and the system worked well for us.

"We pressed them well and didn't give them too much time on the ball.

"The lads gave it their all and you can't afford to have a man sent-off. But when it's so unjust like our's were, it just killed us."

The Poppies, who completed the signing of Serge Makou before the game, confirmed they will be appealing Christie's sending-off.