

All last night's big match action from Kenilworth Road Quickfire goals sink Stags as referee steals the show



Luton Town 2
Mansfield Town 0
Report by John Lomas

REFEREE Steve Cook captured all the attention and headlines on a quite extraordinary evening of drama and frustration for Mansfield Town at Kenilworth Road last night.

Stags, who knew they would go to hell if they could get at least a point, watched Alan Marriott save two Luton penalties, another one fly over the bar, had skipper Steve Foster sent off and boss David Holdsworth ordered off plus seven Mansfield bookings and two brawls as the Hatters finally saw off the gutsy visitors.

Mr Cook booked Kevin Sandwith for the first tackle of the night after only six minutes to set the tone for the night.

And Stags were furious with a string of contentious decisions he made against them including an incredible end to the first half when he

Holdsworth and Steve Foster see red during night of amazing spot-kick drama

gave a harsh-looking penalty against Foster for handball, then ordered a retake after Marriott had saved the first.

The keeper incredibly saved the second too but a brawl that followed saw Foster red-carded and Holdsworth ejected after he finally blew a fuse on the bench over what he was seeing.

Incredibly, promotion favourites Luton spurned another spot kick 20 seconds after the break before they finally broke through with two goals in four minutes.

It was a night the Stags simply want to forget as they headed to Gateshead on Saturday without skipper Foster, though Keigan Parker is available again after suspension.

Luton had completely dominated the first half last night though only for one real save out of man of the match Marriott and Chris Smith had most given the visitors a shock lead with a header wide of the far post.

But quickfire strikes from Danny Crow and one of Holdsworth's former Ilkeston stars Amari Morgan-Smith on his debut saw Hatters take the points on a fiery night.

Stags were able to name the same

side and bench for the third successive match.

The Hatters gave a debut to striker Amari Morgan-Smith, who was signed by David Holdsworth when he was boss of Ilkeston Town.

The Luton bench included ex-Stags stars Adam Murray and Kevin Pilkington.

Sandwith looked unlucky to be booked after only six minutes when he appeared to tackle Gnaka cleanly, but was adjudged to have shown his studs.

And, having set out his stall , the referee had his card out again two minutes later after Keane had brought down Nix.

Sandwith was walking a tightrope as he brought down Gnaka again on 12 minutes, Chris Smith heading the free kick behind at the far post and Keane then overcooking the corner and the ball going out of play well past the far post.

Luton created the first opening on 15 minutes as Crow's pass behind Sandwith split the defence and put Gnaka in the clear.

Marriott did well to block his first attempt and his follow-up went wide of goal to Mansfield's relief.

Nix did well to rob Crow as he was about to shoot in the box as the Hatters continued to press.

On 26 minutes Crow sent Gnaka to the right by-line before running for the return ball at the near post where he stabbed inches wide.

Mansfield's first corner eventually reached Adam Smith whose shot deflected up into the air with Chris Smith getting up well but heading across goal.

Luton resumed their offensive and Gnaka had a shot blocked.

The home side then forced two corners, the second seeing Duffy head off the line as Crow looked like he might force the ball home at the far post.

The pressure was relentless as two more free kicks took it to four on the bounce. But Marriott's goal remained intact.

But the game erupted on 43 minutes after Istead had brought down Murray and been booked.

The free kick bounced in the box and caught Foster's hand as it came up. It seemed a ball to hand, but the referee stunned Stags by awarding a penalty.

Marriott looked to be the hero as he kept out Gnaka's kick, but the referee again stunned Stags by deciding it needed to be re-taken for encroachment.

Stags surrounded him with Adam Smith lucky not to be red-carded for his protests. Foster did well as skipper to calm them down and move them away only to be booked himself at the end of it all.

Amazingly Marriott produced a second spot kick stop, diving full length to his left to thwart Keane.

But as the ball ran for a corner, Foster and Barnes-Homer clashed with both sides piling into a mass brawl in the corner.

Stags fans were restrained by stewards on the perimeter as the situation calmed down and the officials continued.

Amazingly only Foster and Barnes-Homer were called over and Foster shown his second yellow and a red and a yellow for the Luton man.

It was all too much for Stags boss Holdsworth who had a furious row with the referee before being sent from the ground.

The game finally continued into a sixth minute of stoppage time in which Marriott produced more heroics to keep out a Gnaka finish from eight yards from Morgan-Smith's ball in from the left.

Adam Smith was sacrificed at the break to allow Stags to shore up at the back with youngster Naylor.

But the script took another amazing twist as Luton were given and missed their third penalty kick in as many minutes within 20 seconds of the restart.

Sandwith caught Gnaka with a challenge that sent him to the turf and again Mr Cook pointed to the spot. This time Barnes-Homer took responsibility and blazed his kick way over the bar.

But Luton were finally ahead on 51 minutes from a short corner on the right which Crow rammed emphatically high into the net from 12 yards for his first goal for the club.

Chris Smith was furious with the referee when he was adjudged to be handled when he felt the ball hit his shoulder. He argued loud and hard but was eventually booked and, from the free kick, Luton swept into a 2-0 lead.

Marriott punched Keane's ball in out as far as Morgan-Smith, but the youngster was only it like a flash to steer home with some accuracy from just inside the box.

The match erupted once again on 62 minutes as Mills felled Gnaka and once more both sides squared up, Mills eventually becoming Stags' sixth player booked.

Marriott almost let in a Naylor backpass but thankfully had time to stop it at the second attempt. The keeper then tipped over a Crow effort for another home corner as Luton continued to ram home their advantage.

Marriott made another save from a Keane free kick that passed through every man on the Gnaka side, wide down into stoppage time as Stags left Luton licking their wounds.

Match Stats

LUTON: Tyler, Gleeson, F. Murray (Aieno 85 mins), Keane, G. Pilkington, Morgan-Smith (Newton 81 mins), Barnes-Homer (A. Murray 71 mins), Kocca, Howells, Gnaka, Crow. Subs: Blackett, K. Pilkington.

STAGS: Marriott; Silk, C. Smith, Foster, Sandwith; Isted (Briscoe 69 mins), Nix, Mills; A. Smith (Naylor 45 mins), Duffy (Medley 53 mins), Connor. Subs: Stonehouse, Collett.

GOALS: Luton - Crow (51 mins); Morgan-Smith (54 mins).

CAUTIONS: Luton - Keane (8 mins); Barnes-Homer (45+3 mins), Mansfield - Sandwith (6 mins), Isted (42 mins); Foster (45 mins); C. Smith (54 mins); Medley (57 mins); Mills (62 mins); Silk (97 mins).

DISMISSAL: Foster (45+3 mins, second yellow); David Holdsworth (45+3 mins, dissent)

ATTENDANCE: 6024 (303 away).