

Welsh life isn't a breeze for Kroca

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier
Wrexham 1 (1)
Luton Town 0 (0)

WINDSWEPT Wrexham proved to be a real novelty for Czech centre-half Zdenek Kroca who admitted he had never played in such gusty conditions after Luton's 1-0 defeat on Thursday night.

A defensive howler from Freddie Murray handed the three points to the hosts at the Racecourse Ground as his horrible header left keeper Mark Tyler completely stranded in the opening minutes, presenting Andy Mangan with the simplest of chances for what proved to be the winner.

Kroca, 30, said: "I think this was the worst conditions in the case of wind I have ever played in.

"It's not so windy (in the Czech Republic). Sometimes you play the first month of winter in -10C and the pitches were hard and you have to choose the right boots, but not so windy as here.

"Sometimes the wind helped us when it was too long and Tyles could catch it and we could play.

"It was hard for both sides and one mistake in our defence is crucial. We couldn't score and that was crucial.

"After we were one goal down it was hard to break down their defence. We tried to play the ball low as much as possible. Sometimes we were made to put a long ball forward and sometimes it would come right back. It was hard.

"There was only one football and the supporters caught the ball and held on to the ball for a long time. There were too many pauses in the game and we couldn't get the right tempo."

The Hatters made three changes from the side that drew 1-1 at Corby in the FA Cup.

New signing from York Alex Lawless went straight into the midfield, while fit-again duo Andy Drury and Kroca were recalled to the starting XI.



STRETCH:
Andy Drury
battles for
possession
at Wrexham

As a result Taiwo Atieno, Ed Asafu-Adjaye and Dan Walker dropped to the bench.

On the injury that had kept him out, Kroca added: "It was a calf injury, it was from the cup game against St Albans.

"I got a kick and could play in the league matches but with the physio and coaches decided to treat the calf as much as possible to be fit for these tough away games. It's OK now and I can play my best."

The match was preceded by an immaculate minute's silence to mark Armistice Day as the game went ahead despite the gale force winds.

Disaster struck on six minutes though as Murray headed across his six-yard box, handing Mangan the easiest of opportunities.

Town almost leaked a second on eight minutes. Murray was dispossessed and Jamie Tolley was just unable to reach Andy Morrell's delivery, while Tolley then shot over from the edge of the box.

Lawless' dangerous cross was turned behind seconds later, be-

fore Luton almost unlocked the Welsh side's defence. Matthew Barnes-Homer and Lawless combined and the latter's cross picked out Claude Gnaka, making his 100th appearance for the Hatters, but he had just strayed offside.

Gnaka was then unable to quite make anything of Lawless' clipped cross before Drury whipped a shot over as Town struggled to create any clear-cut chances despite the sizeable wind at their backs.

The Hatters should have levelled though on 33 minutes when Drury teased over a sumptuous cross but Barnes-Homer headed straight at Chris Maxwell.

Town turned the screw in the closing stages of the half and they passed up another great opportunity to level before the break as Marvin Andrews was robbed by Barnes-Homer, but Hatters' top scorer could only blast over.

Lawless had a powerful strike blocked by Neil Ashton and it was a frustrated Luton that went into the break 1-0 down.

An aimless pass by half-time substitute Atieno let Wrexham in early in the second half, but Jay Harris spooned wide.

Undeterred, Town passed up another great chance on 50 minutes. Jake Howells beat two players as he surged into the box but could only whiz wide from a tight angle.

Tolley's dangerous in-swinging corner had to be palmed over by Tyler just after the hour, while the home side twice went close on 64 minutes as Tyler saved from both Morrell and Harris.

Maxwell then produced a brilliant full-stretch dive to turn aside Keith Keane's vicious 67th-minute effort that looked destined for the bottom left-hand corner.

Lawless had another crunching shot blocked with 15 minutes to go while Tolley's swerving free-kick dipped just over as Town's hopes faded fast.

Out of ideas the Hatters failed to threaten in the closing stages and limped to defeat as their three-match winning streak came to an end.

Picture by Gareth Owen