

Town gifted victory by Bittner's howler

Blue Square Bet Premier

Forest Green Rovers (0)
Luton Town (1)

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@jpress.co.uk

A TAME Lloyd Owusu strike late in the first half earned the Hatters a hard-fought 1-0 win over Forest Green at the New Lawn last night.

The veteran striker's effort somehow squirmed under home keeper James Bittner to bag the Hatters all three points as they regained third place in the table.

Rovers had the better of the possession and territory but Town crafted the best chances and did just enough to shade victory as the hosts suffered only their second defeat in nine home games.

Luton made four changes to the team that edged past Guiseley 1-0 in the quarter-finals of the FA Trophy on Saturday.

Back came Mark Tyler, Robbie Willmott, Claude Gnaka and Owusu, with Amari Morgan-Smith and Kevin Pilkington dropping to the bench.

The home side started well with Wayne Turk threading a lovely ball through to Reece Styche but Tyler saved his bouncing shot well on a heavily sandied pitch.

Rovers enjoyed by far the best of the opening stages without really creating any more clear-cut opportunities.

Luton had their real first sight of goal on 21 minutes when Keith Keane whipped a good ball into the box but Gnaka could only flick wide.

Playing into a tricky wind the Hatters struggled to get a foothold on the game and a mix-up between Tyler and George Pilkington almost handed Rovers the lead on 29 minutes.

An uncharacteristically poor

header from Pilkington left Tyler stranded and Luke Graham managed to just do enough as Yan Klukowski's effort looped agonisingly on to the roof of the net.

Back came Luton and they were desperately unlucky not to snatch the lead on 33 minutes.

Owusu shielded the ball well in the box and laid a pass into the path of Freddie Murray whose left-footed curler crashed off the inside of the post and out.

Gnaka then tumbled in the box but nothing was doing before the Frenchman whizzed in a cross that Owusu could only head over.

Enjoying their best spell of the game Town did grab the lead through Owusu's fifth goal of the season seven minutes before the break.

Matthew Barnes-Homer and Gnaka did well in the build-up and Owusu's tame prod somehow went through Bittner and into the net.

Howells curved in a tantalising cross towards Barnes-Homer early in the second half but Town's top scorer was just unable to connect from a couple of yards out.

Rovers skipper Luke Jones was then lucky to escape without a red card five minutes in when Owusu was brought down on the edge of the box with just the keeper to beat but not even a free-kick was given.

Moments later Pilkington was robbed by Styche who skipped past Tyler, but overran the ball and took and tumble in the area but again nothing was given.

Rovers continued to threaten with Ross Dyer unable to properly



TRUE GRIT: Hatters midfielder Keith Keane battles for possession at Forest Green Rovers on Tuesday night as Luton won 1-0

connect with Klukowski's cross and Zdenek Kroca producing a great block to deny Dyer.

Town then had appeals for a penalty turned down on 65 minutes when Graham headed Jake Howells' free-kick back across goal and the ball appeared to hit Chris Stokes' arm.

Luton continued to struggle to string their passes together for almost all of a disjointed second half.

A promising Owusu pull-back went begging and a teasing Howells cross with six minutes to go didn't find a taker either as Luton promised a second.

Rovers made a second change with five minutes to go to leave them with four strikers on the pitch.

Only a great reaction stop and recovery from Bittner prevented Town from scoring a second with three minutes to go though.

Keane fired in a fine free-kick and a diving header from substitute Danny Crow forced an instinctive save from the keeper who managed to snatch the ball back from the brink of the line.

Crow had a curling free-kick deflected just wide in stoppage time while Styche fired a great opportunity straight at Tyler in the dy-

Picture by Kevin Fern

Rovers (4-4-1): James Bittner, Luke Jones (C), Reece Styche, Ross Dyer, Danny Hall, Chris Stokes, Yan Klukowski (Steve Guinan 66), Gavin Gaines, Wayne Turk (Liam Enver-Marum 85), Kieron Forbes, Matt Sommer.

Substitutes not used: Craig Armstrong, Bradley Gray, Jeffrey Imudia.

Hatters (4-4-2): Mark Tyler, Luke Graham, Freddie Murray, George Pilkington (C), Zdenek Kroca, Claude Gnaka, Keith Keane, Jake Howells, Robbie Willmott (Paul Carden 63), Lloyd Owusu, Matthew Barnes-Homer (Danny Crow 63).

Substitutes not used: Kevin Pilkington, Godfrey Poku, Amari Morgan-Smith.

Bookings: Pilkington 55, Gnaka 57, Crow 88, Gaines 90.

Referee: Richard Martin.

Assistant referees: Tom Hartly and Alan Raggett.

Fourth official: Paul Tyler.

Attendance: 1,015 (Luton 399)

Star Hatter: Keith Keane. Full of endeavour and won the midfield battle.

ing stages.

The rejuvenated Crow then produced a moment of magic in the 83rd seconds as he tiptoed past two tackles and along the byline, pushing the ball back to Gnaka whose shot was blocked and substituted. Paul Carden's blast from the rebound was then repulsed as Town claimed a hard-fought win.

Boss Richard Money said: "Clean sheets give you a chance of winning football matches, long may it continue."

"You'd always take a 1-0 win 100 per cent, thanks very much. There more points on the board is the only thing that matters."