

Striker holds up his hands as Stags party

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@press.co.uk

**FA Trophy semi-final first leg
Mansfield Town 1 (0)
Luton Town 0 (0)**

THWARTED striker Danny Crow admitted he was one of many Town culprits in front of goal as Hatters went down to a 1-0 defeat in their FA Trophy semi-final first leg at Field Mill on Sunday.

A string of fine saves from on-loan Notts County keeper David Grof and the woodwork frustrated Luton as the Stags stole the advantage in the two clubs' quest for Wembley.

The Hatters were the far more creative side but failed to take their chances and were made to pay when Danny Mitchley squeezed home the winner 17 minutes into the second half.

Town huffed and puffed throughout, but couldn't find the net and face an uphill battle in their bid to reach Wembley in the return leg at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

Substitute Crow had a header well saved in the closing minutes and said: "I just thought about directing it back across goal and the keeper saved it.

"I think we've been battering teams. There's a few missed chances and I'm one of the main culprits I won't hide the fact.

"It was unfortunate for ourselves. We've got another game

Pictures by Annie Shelley



LOCKING HORNS:
Keith Keane wins
this battle for
Town on Sunday

and it's only half time. We will take them back to Kenilworth Road and fancy our chances."

After a frenetic start Luton crafted the first chance of the game with a beautiful flowing move on 12 minutes. Jake Howells and Freddie Murray combined brilliantly on the left and the latter's cross was teed up by Matthew Barnes-Homer but Lloyd Owusu could only balloon wastefully over.

Murray blasted well wide after more good work from Claude Gnaka and Barnes-Homer and the Frenchman then produced some more magic to set Howells up but a last-ditch Kevin Sandwith challenge and a strong hand from Grof was just enough to

turn his shot past the post.

Mansfield proceeded to enjoy their best spell of the game and only a combination of Murray and George Pilkington denied Mitchley on 29 minutes, before Kyle Nix was blocked by the Luton skipper and Paul Connor had a goal ruled out for offside.

Town were hitting too many ineffective long balls but almost grabbed the lead two minutes before the interval when Keith Keane whipped in a cross to the far post and Grof could only parry Owusu's powerful header, but no-one was lurking as the sides went into the break goalless.

Howells threaded through a fine ball for Barnes-Homer on 54 minutes and he picked out Alex

Lawless on the edge of the box whose first time effort was well beaten away by Grof.

Lawless then surged through the middle but his long-range drive was again pushed round the post by Grof.

Tom Spence's defensive header only just cleared the bar before George Pilkington headed a deep Lawless centre back across goal and the ball clipped the woodwork on it's way over.

True to form Luton were caught with the sucker punch seconds later as Mansfield took a 62nd-minute lead.

Mitchley did well to fend off the attentions of George Pilkington and span well before somehow squeezing home a shot in off the far post.

Good defending by Luke Graham then kept Mitchley out before Luton were denied by another fine stop from Grof.

A fluid move eventually saw Howells dink in a lovely first-time cross but Crow's header was straight at the Mansfield stopper who was again able to bat the ball away.

Amari Morgan-Smith almost got in behind with three minutes left but was again thwarted by Grof before Crow's effort was smuggled behind with appeals for handball waved away.

Barnes-Homer had a howitzer deflected behind deep into stoppage time as Town failed to find a way through and handed the first leg initiative to the Stags.