

Willmott strikes in Team Luton victory

Blue Square Bet Premier
Rushden & Diamonds 0 (0)
Luton Town 1 (1)

by Mike Simmonds

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TEAM Luton got off to a winning start with a battling victory at Rushden & Diamonds last night.

Roared on by an excellent travelling contingent, the Hatters were never at their best in a scrappy match, but showed bucket loads of character and commitment to earn another vital three points.

Hatters boss Richard Money made five changes to the side that drew with Mansfield in the FA Trophy at the weekend with Mark Tyler, Amari Morgan-Smith, Robbie Willmott, Paul Carden and Danny Crow restored the starting line up, with the recalled Dan Hutter, after his loan spell at Cambridge, on the bench.

Diamonds created the first opening as Max Porter's low 20-yarder was comfortably gathered by Tyler, before Crow sent a half volley straight at Joe Day.

Hatters were in front on 11 minutes though, as George Pilkington sent a long ball forward and Robbie Willmott capitalised on Shane Huke's woefully underhit back-pass to slot under Joe Day for his second goal in Town colours.

The hosts tried their luck from distance when Alan Power sent a 20-yard free-kick into the gloves of Tyler, while the impressive Michael Gash's header dribbled into Tyler's hands too.

Diamonds had another sighter when Matt Johnson drilled across goal, but the remainder of the first half saw the ball spend far too much time in the air, as Carden had Town's only chance of note, shooting well wide from 20 yards.

The hosts almost levelled on the stroke of half time when former

Hatter Ryan Charles sped past Adam Newton and crossed low where Pilkington's clearance ricocheted off Gash and flew just wide off the post.

Rushden were first to show after the interval as Michael Corcoran cut inside and his left-footer was easily held by Tyler.

The match turned unnecessarily nasty in the space of a few minutes with Jamie Day scything down Keith Keane to earn a yellow card, while Huke immediately followed suit, recklessly chopping down Willmott.

Gary Mills continued the theme on 59 minutes as he received Rushden's third booking after a foul on the tricky Willmott again.

With 63 minutes on the clock, Jason Walker came on for Morgan-Smith and almost scored with his first meaningful foray forward.

Latching on to Keane's hooked pass forward, he was left one-on-one with Eddie Oshodi, but couldn't beat his man in the box.

The rebound was met by a stumbling Crow, whose toe-poke was fumbled by Joe Day, but the keeper recovered well to block Willmott's fierce follow up and Jamie Day got back to head off the line as the ball looped towards the net.

The match then finally caught to life as Tyler kept Hatters level with a superb reaction save from Gash's turn and shot and then arched his back to tip Corcoran's header over.

Hatters looked to catch the hosts on the break whenever possible and Jake Howells sent a right footer skimming over from an



MAKING HIS MARK: Robbie Willmott scored his second goal for the Hatters as Team Luton eased to a 1-0 win at Rushden & Diamonds

acute angle.

Walker had claims for a penalty with five minutes remaining, falling under the challenge of Oshodi, but the striker looked to have dived in the box, and was lucky to escape a caution.

Diamonds then went straight up the other end and had shouts for a spot kick of their own, as Howells leaned on Charles in the box, but once more, nothing was given.

As time ran out, the hosts threw caution to the wind, but Corcoran's effort dribbled through to Tyler, while once again, Walker failed to administer the final touch in the hosts' penalty area.

At the final whistle, the visiting players and management went over as one to the away supporters, giving further proof that Team Luton are up and running in their bid for promotion this season.

Diamonds: Joe Day, Eddie Oshodi, Max Porter (C), Gary Mills, Jamie Day, Alan Power, Michael Corcoran, Matt Johnson (Nabil Shaerif 87), Ryan Charles, Shane Huke, Michael Gash. **Substitutes not used:** Simon Evans, Craig Farrell, Joe Keane, Morgan Phillips.
Hatters: Mark Tyler, Keith Keane, George Pilkington (C), Adam Newton, Amari Morgan-Smith (Jason Walker 63), Matthew Barnes, Homer, Robbie Willmott, Zsolt Kocsis, Jake Howells, Paul Garden, Danny Crow (Godfrey Poku 74). **Substitutes not used:** Kevin Pilkington, Luke Graham, Dan Walker.
Referee: M Bull.
Assistant referees: A Tyne and J Martin.
Fourth official: A Tonks.
Bookings: Jamie Day 49; Shane Huke 50; Gary Mills 59; Godfrey Poku 76.
Attendance: 2,459 (1,227 Luton).
Star Hatter: George Pilkington. Real captain's performance at the back.