

Hatters blow it once again

Blue Square Bet Premier
Luton Town 2 (1) Kettering 2 (0)

LUTON Town manager Gary Brabin was denied a first win in charge after Hatters conceded an injury-time goal to draw against Kettering Town last night.

With 90 minutes on the clock, Hatters' defence, which had looked nervy all evening, was breached by the Poppies as Danny Mills tapped home despite the best efforts from Mark Tyler.

After consecutive draws against Barrow and Kidderminster Harriers, Brabin thought he had chalked up a mark in the victory column thanks to goals from Jake Howells and Amari Morgan-Smith.

But Kettering twice fought back through Brett Solkhon and then Mills, as Town were pegged back in time added on for the second consecutive game.

Brabin made four changes to the side that drew 3-3 with Kidderminster, with Adam Newton and Claude Gnaka coming in, while Jason Walker started his first match since February 18 and Morgan-Smith was finally given a chance in his natural striking position. Visiting Kettering included

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former Hatters Ian Roper and Sol Davis, while pre-season trialist Stefan Bailey warmed the bench.

A quiet opening saw Keith Keane take matters into his own hands on 11 minutes, firing a 30-yarder that Willy Gueret did well to tip over at full stretch. Kettering had their moments too when Danny Mills showed some tricky footwork to spin clear in the box but Keane was alert to clear the danger.

An incisive run from Gnaka ended with Davis tripping him just outside the area to earn a booking and from the resulting free-kick, Walker's goalbound shot was deflected away.

Mills then should have put the Poppies ahead on 20 minutes as he eased through Newton's half-hearted challenge and past Zdenek Kroca, but Tyler saved well with his legs.

Callum Wilson also tested Tyler from 20 yards, while Robbie Willmott tried to repeat his superb free-kick at Kidderminster, only to see his effort fly over.

The deadlock was finally bro-

Pictures by Jane Russell



GOALS: Jake Howells fires in the first and celebrates, right, while Amari Morgan-Smith nets, above



ken on 40 minutes in fine style when Howells played the ball into Walker and continued his run beyond the frontman, picking up the striker's clever back flick to volley past Gueret for his third goal of the season.

With their confidence clearly lifted, Gnaka went close before the interval, rising highest to head Morgan-Smith's dinked cross at Gueret. Wilson might have drawn his side level on the stroke of half time, but after Kroca rashly slid in, he blasted well over the bar from 18 yards.

It didn't take Kettering long to equalise though as the second period was just three minutes old when Howells' clearance was charged down allowing Brett Solkhon to waltz through the home defence and past Tyler to roll the ball home.

The hosts weren't behind for long though, with Howells again the architect. Pouncing on a clearance, he skipped past Luke O'Neill's

challenge and played a one-two with Willmott, before his slide-rule cross was powered home by Morgan-Smith, for his first goal since his hat-trick against St Albans way back on October 23

The striker came close to adding a second, but miskicked George Pilkington's pass, while Tyler carefully gathered Kieron St Aime's bouncing effort.

Gnaka was clearly starting to enjoy himself, attempting an audacious chip on 67 minutes that the backpedalling Gueret held.

The game fell into a lull for long periods of the second half, but Alex Lawless tried to liven proceedings, advancing forward and drilling off target. Just when it looked like Town had picked up a welcome three points, Mills tricked his way through the hosts' backline and, although Tyler saved his first attempt, there was no stopping the follow up, as Hatters endured another frustrating night under the lights at Kenilworth Road.