

Gary tells Town 'relax'

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 6 (2) Southport 0 (0)

RELAXED Luton let rip as they thumped Southport 6-0 at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

Hatters avenged their worst performance of the season two weeks ago when they lost 2-1 to the same opposition at Haig Avenue.

Crawley may have sealed the Blue Square Bet Premier title with a 3-0 victory at Tamworth, but Town put in an impressive performance as they edged closer to cementing a play-off place and recorded a first win for new manager Gary Brabin in the process.

Luton dominated the first half, leading 2-0 at the break with goals from Amari Morgan-Smith and Robbie Willmott, before Town blitzed the Sandgrounders in the last six minutes with further goals from Freddie Murray, Jason Walker, Zdenek Kroca and Claude Gnaka.

Integral midfield cog Alex Lawless believes the pressure of no longer having to chase Crawley has helped to free them up.

Lawless said: "He (manager Gary Brabin) is just telling us to relax. We were chasing Crawley before, it put a lot of pressure on. "We are a bit more free."

Although he didn't play in the game at Haig Avenue, Lawless admitted there was a feeling amongst the players of needing to put the record straight.

He said: "I sensed it a little bit with the lads. I think that's always the case."

"There have been a lot of changes after it and some people felt worse about the game."

Town made just one change from the side that were held to a 2-2 home draw by Kettering last Tuesday night with Gnaka dropping to the bench and Murray coming in at left-back.

Pictures by Joanna Cross



JOY OF SIX: Amari Morgan-Smith celebrates, main, while Robbie Willmott also scores and is joined by Jake Howells and Jason Walker

Luton bossed the first half with Morgan-Smith curling wide early on after combining with Lawless before Willmott dragged an effort wide of the net after a long pass by Kroca.

A wonderful free-flowing Luton move should have put the hosts ahead four minutes later. Adam Newton's accurate pass to Walker was expertly laid into the path of Lawless whose first-time pass found Kroca unmarked on the edge of the box, but the Czech defender spooned well over with just Tony McMillan left to beat.

Seconds later Morgan-Smith was just beaten to Walker's through ball by McMillan, while Walker then sent a free header over from Willmott's corner.

A venomous Willmott free-kick was handled by Aaron Turner as it dipped just over, and after he was booked and the free-kick moved 10 yards forward, Morgan-Smith cutely curled the ball round the wall and inside the near post on 22 minutes.

Walker rolled a tame effort straight at McMillan, Jake Howells had a goal ruled out for offside and George Pilkington could

only glance Morgan-Smith's teasing cross over on 32 minutes.

Matty McGinn, meanwhile, sent a well-placed free-kick deep into the Kenny end as Southport looked a shadow of the side that dominated Luton up north.

Town deservedly doubled their lead with another sumptuous move six minutes before the break. Howells threaded the ball through to Lawless and he timed his pass perfectly for Willmott to dart through and deftly dink the ball over McMillan for a perfect counter-attack goal.

Willmott was thwarted by McMillan, Pilkington jabbed just wide and Morgan-Smith rolled an effort at the keeper as Town took a thoroughly deserved two-goal lead into the break.

The Sandgrounders made two changes at the interval and looked far more purposeful immediately after the interval.

Much of the second half was a drab affair compared with the first and a mistake from Kroca almost let Steve Daly in on 65 minutes, but Mark Tyler saved well at his feet.

Substitute Gnaka opened up

Southport seconds later but Walker's fierce effort flew just over, while Tony Gray almost made an instant impact when he fired an opportunistic effort straight at Tyler.

Tyler then had to be aware to turn a John-Paul Kissock free-kick past the post before the Hatters wasted another great chance on 71 minutes. Gnaka's marauding run down the middle created the opportunity and Lawless's reverse pass left Walker with just McMillan to beat, but he could only lift his effort over the bar.

Gray sent a header straight at Tyler from McGinn's inviting cross before Murray scored his first professional goal with six minutes to go. The full-back lobbed the ball over his man on the left and his drive across goal took a massive deflection on its way into the net.

Luton grabbed their fourth two minutes later when Lawless drove through the middle and his mishot shot fell kindly for Walker.

A poor first touch allowed McMillan to save his first effort before the striker squeezed the follow-up past the covering defender.

Gnaka sent a late drive straight at McMillan and in the third minute of stoppage time Keith Keane whipped a deep free-kick to the far post where Pilkington headed back across goal for Kroca to force home.

Earl Davis was left off a second booking, but Town completed the rout deep into stoppage time when Gnaka was felled by a clumsy challenge by McMillan.

The Frenchman grabbed the ball and kept his cool to fire home from the spot.

A buoyant Kenilworth Road was bouncing at the final whistle and the Sandgrounders' day went from bad to worse when substitute Adam Flynn was harshly shown a straight red card after kicking the ball at the referee on his way off the pitch.