



PLAY-OFF SEMI-FINAL SECOND LEG LUTON TOWN 2 WREXHAM 1

Kroca 29, Walker 81

Mangan 8

LUTON TOWN WON 5-2 ON AGGREGATE



By Stuart Hammonds

MARK TYLER underlined why he is rated by many as the best keeper outside the League by giving Luton a huge helping hand on their way back towards the elite.

Three-nil up from the first leg, the Hatters were on the receiving end of a Wrexham romp in the opening 20 minutes at Kenilworth Road and seemed set for a collapse of Milanese magnitude.

Andy Mangan had already reduced the deficit when the left-sided forward – who with Adrian Cieslewicz had exposed the home side's nerves with pace and purpose down the flanks – earned his side a penalty.

But former Peterborough number one Tyler proved equal to Gareth Taylor's spot-kick, saving low to his left, and gave the Hatters the confidence to play their own game, eventually winning with goals from Zdenek Kroca and Jason Walker.

They qualified for the Eastlands final with a 5-1 aggregate victory, but manager Gary Brabin said: "Mark Tyler is a top quality keeper. He has a number two behind him in Kevin Pilkington who is also a top keeper. The competition between them is immense.

"We are lucky to be in that situation. When you have Mark in goal you're always confident that you're not going to concede three goals. When the penalty came and it is a 50/50 chance, you have every faith in him."

With Lee Fowler in the mid-field quarter-back role in place of the injured Chris Blackburn, Wrexham had started looking much more confident and fluent than in the first leg.

Cieslewicz, who had replaced Nathaniel Knight-Percival in the only other change, was making inroads down the right and, after ghosting past Ed Asafu-Adjaye, he crossed low for Mangan to steer in his 16th goal of the season in the eighth minute.

Then came the penalty, which – for all Wrexham's endeavours – was their only other decent opportunity. Mangan teased his way towards the byeline and when he tried to flick it inside Gleeson, the defender's hand was in the way and ref Carl Berry rightly pointed to the spot.

Dragons deflated and Luton lifted, Brabin's men began to exert control and produced some of their finest football of the season after Czech defender Kroca had taken advantage of some hesitant goalkeeping by Chris Maxwell to head home Asafu-Adjaye's 29th minute free-kick.



THE ONLY WAY IS UP:
Zdenek Kroca celebrates
Luton's equaliser

PICTURES: Adrian Images

HAPPY HATTERS ARE SPOT ON!

"We are a young side and we want to play football in the right way, but you can't take away the fact that it was a big occasion," said Brabin. "There was a lot of expectancy and there was going to be some nervousness, but to come through it and win was a fantastic achievement.

"Wrexham are a good side and in the play-offs on merit.

They were a wounded animal and threw everything at us.

"Once half-time came we were happy, had a little chat, ironed out a few problems and looked like ourselves in the second half.

"I said to the lads, 'We are a good side, we just need to settle down, do the things we've worked on, start enjoying it and

stop worrying about occasion and the scoreline.' They did that in the second half." 10/11 (PO)

Tyler won Luton's man-of-the-match award, with the home fans in the 9,078 crowd chanting 'England's number one' when not bouncing national anthems backwards and forwards with their 831 magnificently vocal counterparts from north Wales.

His opposite number Maxwell put the disappointment of the equaliser behind him to produce a string of fine stops to deny Robbie Willmott a four-goal haul, Jake Howells and Claude Gnaka before Walker volleyed in with nine minutes left.

Wrexham were left to rue what had gone on at the Racecourse five days earlier. Manager Dean Saunders said: "We did well to get in front, but obviously the penalty cost us. You can watch these play-offs until you're old and grey and there will be penalties missed, great goals scored and sitters missed.

"Three teams end up crying and one gets through. It is a bit of a lottery, no matter how good your team is. The supporters were fantastic. We galvanised everybody and I thought they were proud of the way the players had a go. They didn't just roll over and die."



FINAL FLING: Fans are held back by police on the pitch after the game

MATCH STATS LUTON v WREXHAM

10 SHOTS ON TARGET	4
4 SHOTS OFF TARGET	3
8 CORNERS	9
5 OFFSIDE	6
8 FOULS CONCEDED	13
0 YELLOW CARDS	1
0 RED CARDS	0

STAR MAN: Mark Tyler (Luton)
ATT: 9,078

ENTERTAINMENT: *****
REF RATING: Carl Berry 7/10

LUTON TOWN: 4-3-3: Tyler 9, Gleeson 6, Kroca 7, G. Pilkington 7, Asafu-Adjaye 6, Lawless 7, Keane 7 (Newton 90, 5), Howells 8, Gnaka 7 (Barnes-Homer 88, 5), Willmott 8, Walker 7.
Subs not used: Graham, K. Pilkington, Owusu.

WREXHAM: 4-3-3: Maxwell 7, Obeng 6, Greighton 7, Sinclair 6 (Andrews 66, 6), Ashton 6, Fowler 8, Keates 7, Harris 6 (Anoruo 76, 5), Cieslewicz 8, Mangan 7, Taylor 6 (Tolley 64, 6). Subs not used: Knight-Percival, Mayebi.