

Field of bad dreams

Antwi rescues point as search for first league win at Field Mill continues

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BLUE SQUARE BET PREMIER

MANSFIELD TOWN 1
LUTON TOWN 1

WHAT have Harold Wightman, Bill Harvey, Alec Stock, Harry Haslam, Joe Kinnear, Richard Money and Gary Brabin all got in common? They are all Luton Town managers who have taken sides to Mansfield Town's Field Mill home and failed to secure maximum league points.

Last night's 1-1 draw stretched the unfortunate league run to 12 games and almost 80 years without a win at the Nottinghamshire stadium, but it was a game they should have won.

You have to go back to 1989 and a League Cup tie to find the Hatters' solitary triumph at the second oldest football ground in the country after Hallam FC's Sandyground Road home.

On the Brightside, when Will Antwi, handed the captain's armband, netted his second goal in as many games with 23 minutes remaining it ended another fledgling hoodoo of a Hatters goalless streak that was threatening to edge into four straight games at Conference level.

In his programme notes, Mansfield manager Paul Cox remarked how opponents had been finding his side's net with every chance they created. But despite dominating for large parts of the first half Luton couldn't convert any of theirs, further strengthening the search for a scorer of "scruffy" goals, as Brabin has put it.

Mansfield's opener was anything but that as Matt Green lashed into the top corner against the run of play. It's the sort of punishment that is often dished out to wasteful sides in the Premier League, not the Blue Square Bet Premier, but after Luton had failed to take their opportunities, it was a familiar dénouement – one that has been a factor of so many a frustrating non-league encounter.

Afterwards Brabin said: "We are not overly disappointed, coming

ON YER HEAD: Will Antwi heads home Luton's equaliser



away to Mansfield. It's a tough place to come and these were one of the early favourites. We've been a little bit blighted before the game with injuries and before the game we'd probably have taken a point, but I thought we deserved more."

Injuries forced three big changes with Keith Keane, Alex Lawless and Robbie Willmott all omitted from the squad after Saturday's 5-1 win over Southport. In came Danny Crow, Amari Morgan-Smith and Ed Asafu-Adjaye, while teenager Adam Watkins was given his second start.

They persisted with a 4-3-3 formation however but started fairly nervously with a number of unforced errors putting them on the back foot.

It took until the tenth minute for Luton to find any penetration. Crow flicked on to Aaron O'Connor who stole a march down the wing but saw former Hatter Adam Murray and Martin Riley twice throw their bodies in the way of his shots.

They should have gone ahead moments later when Watkins fed in Morgan-Smith who showed a clean

pair of heels to Luke O'Neill, only to be denied by Stags stopper Alan Marriott.

Asafu-Adjaye, who'd been the source of the early nervousness, was then beaten by Louis Briscoe, but the winger – whose late goal dumped the Hatters out of the FA Trophy last term – could only drag wide.

Luton were threatening with more regularity but against the run of play in the 27th minute, Matt Green fired an unstoppable shot into the top corner from 18 yards.

After that, Hatters failed to find their pre-goal verve while the hosts should have netted either side of the break though Ross Dyer and Ben Futchler.

On the hour, a Watkins drive needed Marriott to tip over while a Dance volley from the resulting corner was destined for the net had the penalty box not been so crowded.

With Luton restricted to shots from range Brabin introduced young striker Dan Walker for his first appearance of the season in place of the out of sorts O'Connor.

But it was Mansfield who still

looked the more likely to grab the game's second goal, and only Mark Tyler's upright prevented Green from doubling his tally.

The goalscorer was then cautioned in a moment of controversy after Dean Beckwith hit the deck clutching his head.

His centre back partner then popped up to steer Jake Howells' free-kick inside Marriott's post.

Tyler had to beat away a Green blast as both sides went hell for leather for the winner.

But a share of the spoils it was and if things go to plan for Luton and not the Stags this term, the two clubs will be in different divisions this time next year and the Bedfordshire outfit will have to be glad to wait even longer for their chance to end this Field Mill jinx. In the meantime, preserving their unbeaten record is a decent compromise.

LUTON: Tyler, Beckwith, Morgan-Smith, Crow, O'Connor (Walker, 62), Howells, Asafu-Adjaye (Gleeson, 57), Antwi, Osano, Dance, Watkins

Unused subs: K. Pilkington, Barnes-Homer, Poku