

Fleetwood so close to a dream Hatters start

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier
Stockport County 1 (0)
Luton Town 1 (1)

NEW signing Stuart Fleetwood was inches away from making a dream debut as Town suffered a heartbreaking 1-1 draw at Stockport County on Friday night.

A thumping Alex Lawless strike had given the Bedfordshire Hatters an early lead at Edgeley Park but despite playing the more attractive football and creating chances they couldn't find a killer second.

Sean McConville levelled with a cruelly deflected shot in the 92nd-minute although Fleetwood came within inches of winning it when his sharp strike cracked the inside of a post as Luton had to settle for just a point when they should have had all three.

Fleetwood, who signed from Hereford just before the transfer window slammed shut, said: "I hit it really sweet and couldn't have hit it any better.

"It came back off the post and it wasn't my night because it flew back into the keeper's hands.

"It would have been a dream start on my debut."

Town have lost leads twice in their last two games and Fleetwood is keen to eradicate that tendency, saying: "I wasn't happy about losing a goal start.

"I'm led to believe it's happened a few times and we will look to rectify it on the training pitch this week."

He had no issues about starting the game from the bench, adding: "I spoke to the gaffer and he said he wasn't sure whether he would start or would put me on the bench but they haven't lost a game yet and I have no qualms about that."

Jake Howells and Dean Beckwith were ruled out through in-

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jury and illness as bare bones Luton made the perfect start.

A sweeping passing move saw Luton break from one end of the pitch to the other, switching flanks in the process, before Lawless was teed up 25 yards from goal and he let fly with an unstoppable strike into the bottom left-hand corner.

Mark Tyler struggled to smuggle a Danny Rowe long-range effort behind, while Robbie Willmott could only drag wide after producing some neat footwork.

Luton looked excellent going forward but slightly unsure at the back and County almost grabbed an equaliser on 12 minutes but McConville could only flick Euan Holden's cross agonisingly wide.

New signing Antonio German fired an effort straight at Tyler before Town were desperately unlucky not to double their lead after a quarter of an hour.

Matt Glennon could only beat away Willmott's ferocious strike from the edge of the area and Will Antwi's acrobatic scissor-kick was somehow kept out by the struggling stopper.

Luton's passing football was a delight to watch at times with John Paul Kissock producing some mesmerising jinks in the

middle of the field.

However, Town's makeshift backline was a worry and Holden got in behind on 24 minutes and whipped a delightful cross to the far post but the dangerous Nick Chadwick could only head wastefully wide.

County were having some joy down both flanks but it was the visitors who were playing the better football and a sumptuous interchange between Willmott and Kissock saw the winger tease a delightful cross that Danny Crow could only slide into the side netting.

McConville's perfect first touch saw him whistle wide early in the second half, while Amari Morgan-Smith did brilliantly to steal on to a defensive header and beat Glennon to the ball on the edge of the box, but he couldn't find the gaping net.

An equaliser always seemed possible with an offside-looking McConville just unable to get a touch on a German shot that ran wide.

A dipping Morgan-Smith strike flew narrowly over on 69 minutes and, although Luton weren't keeping the ball as well in the second half, they should have sealed victory on 73 minutes.

Keith Keane, deputising at centre-half, saw his raking crossfield pass headed into the path of the galloping Morgan-Smith by substitute James Dance, but Town's top scorer could only strike tamely at the onrushing keeper.

Keane did well to deflect former Town trialist Jon Routledge's effort over the bar with 10 minutes to go and Carl Piergianni headed the subsequent corner straight at Tyler.

The visitors broke swiftly with Lawless striding through the middle and slipping in Crow whose powerful effort was turned behind by the hands of Glennon.

Crow made way for Fleetwood on 84 minutes and Danny O'Donnell did brilliantly to cut out Morgan-Smith's dangerous cross that seemed destined for a goal.

Stockport weren't done yet and a quickly-taken corner was headed back across goal with only two minutes left but the unguarded German could only stab wide at the far post.

Five minutes of injury time were added and County got a sickening and barely-deserved leveler two minutes in.

A single mistake from Curtis Osano allowed Stockport to break and the referee played a good advantage as the stand-in Luton left-back clattered into his man.

The ball eventually fell to McConville at the far post as his strike took a wicked deflection off the luckless Ed Asafu-Adjaye to sail over the wrong-footed Tyler.

Still there was more drama to come as Luton were millimetres away from netting a last-gasp winner.

Hesitancy in the Stockport defence allowed Morgan-Smith to head into the path of Fleetwood whose shot streaked past Glennon, cannoned off the far post and back into the keeper's thankful grasp as Town were cruelly thwarted.