

Town sunk by late goal

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier

Ebbsfleet United 2 (0)
Luton Town 2 (1)

WEARY Hatters threw away a two-goal lead as their hopes of victory went 'West' at Ebbsfleet last night with the home side grabbing a 93rd-minute equaliser.

Goals from Amari Morgan-Smith and James Dance had put Town firmly in command with 14 minutes to play, but a tired second half showing saw one fortunate and one stunning long strike strange at the death, both from Michael West, earned Fleet a share of the spoils.

With Keith Keane suspended after picking up five yellow cards, Town boss Gary Brabin sprung a massive surprise by plunging first team coach Paul Carden into the starting XI for his first appearance of the season.

Town threatened early on as the ball broke for Morgan-Smith on the edge of the box but his fierce drive fizzed inches wide.

The linesman's flag saved Luton as Calum Willock raced on to Tom Phipp's through ball on seven minutes, while Dance could only blaze wildly over after good work by the in-form Morgan-Smith.

However, the Hatters needed an outstanding save from Mark Tyler to keep them level on 15 minutes when Willock laid the ball into the path of Giannoulis Fakinos in the area but the Luton keeper dived full-stretch to his left to palm the ball away.

West sent a wild free-kick over the bar before an offside Aaron O'Connor drew a wonder save from Preston Edwards with his header on 22 minutes.



STUNNER: Amari Morgan-Smith

The Fleet keeper was to the fore again nine minutes later when Dance did well to slip the shackles of Yado Mambo and O'Connor managed to control a difficult cross before drawing a sharp save from Edwards with his snapshot.

Jamie Hand's header from the resulting corner went just wide while Joe Howe lashed over as both teams threatened going forward before Town took the lead with an unbelievable strike from the outstanding Morgan-Smith.

The striker controlled the ball and beat Craig Stone all in one movement before cutting inside and curling a stunning strike into the top corner from the edge of the area.

One too many fouls in the middle saw Hand the first man into the book before Fleet should have levelled on the stroke of half time as captain Paul Lorraine forced a superb instinctive stop from the feet of Tyler before sending the instant rebound just over the unguarded net.

The hosts started the second half brightly, West thwarted by the linesman's flag inside 30 seconds and

Janos Kovacs was booked for a 'two-footed challenge' where he cleanly and clearly won the ball.

A deathly-quiet second period was suddenly enlivened by Luton's second goal on 71 minutes as Dance did well to waltz on to Curtis Osano's throw and somehow squeezed the ball under the body of Edwards in front of Town's jubilant travelling supporters.

But that two-goal cushion was short-lived as Fleet pulled a goal back out of the blue five minutes later. A half-cleared corner was fired back in by West and the normally reliable Tyler could only fumble into his own net.

Buoyed by that strike the home side pushed on. Shane Blackett producing a brilliant recovery block and substitute Scott Ginty was denied by Tyler.

Town replacement Adam Watkins curled straight at Edwards in the 90th-minute as four minutes of stoppage time were signalled and another heartbreaking end was in store as Fleet claimed a 93rd-minute equaliser.

Luton struggled to clear a series of long throws and West produced some magic on the edge of the area before unleashing an unstoppable drive that smacked in off the under side of the bar.

Fleet (4-4-2): Preston Edwards, Craig Stone, Giannoulis Fakinos (Alex Stravrinou 30), Paul Lorraine (C), Michael West, Ram Marwa (Lanre Azeez 85), Calum Willock, Tom Phipp, Joe Howe, Yado Mambo, Jamie Darvill (Scott Ginty 74). **Substitutes not used:** Ian Simpimba, Joe Welch.

Hatters (4-3-3): Mark Tyler, George Pilkington (C), Amari Morgan-Smith (Adam Watkins 84), Robbie Willmott, Shane Blackett, Aaron O'Connor (Stuart Fleetwood 66), Curtis Osano, James Dance, Paul Carden, Jamie Hand, Janos Kovacs. **Substitutes not used:** Will Antwi, John Paul Kissock, Kevin Pilkington. **Bookings:** Hand 45; Kovacs 48.

Referee: John Hopkins.
Assistant Referees: Lloyd Wood and Marc Wilson.
Fourth Official: Nolan Wilde.
Attendance: 1,651.
Star Hatter: James Dance. Battling midfield display.