

Quick response was key

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@jpress.co.uk

FA Cup Fourth Round Qualifying
Luton Town 5 (3) Hendon 1 (1)

HITTING back moments after conceding a shock lead to Hendon was key in Luton recovering to ease past the Greens in the FA Cup on Saturday.

But two-goal hero Aaron O'Connor admitted Luton had done exactly what they were told not to against the Isthmian League Premier Division high-fliers. He said: "Going out before the game it was the one thing we were talking about.

"We knew they would come out of the blocks and enjoy the stage. It was all built up for them.

"We said don't concede early and switch on for all the set pieces. That's the one thing we didn't do. They got an early goal and got an early lift."

O'Connor restored parity from the spot and from that moment he believed there would only be one winner, saying: "We were fortunate not to be behind for too long, got the penalty and kicked on from there.

"I think the longer it would have stayed at 1-0 the harder we would have found it with them sitting back.

"Even when they went down to 10 they still didn't play too bad.

"You could kind of see their heads drop as soon as conceding the goal and there was only one team that would go on and win it from there.

"We created a lot of chances and wore them down. Second half we started to move the ball quicker and in the last 25 minutes they were down to 10 men and we made that extra man count.

"We moved them about and they couldn't cope with the passing and movement.

"The keeper made some good

Pictures by Joanna Cross



STRAIGHT BACK:
Dean Beckwith is fouled in the box on Saturday

saves and it could have been a lot more. I don't think they could argue with the scoreline."

A calamitous start saw the Greens shock Kenilworth Road on five minutes when captain Scott Cousins' beautiful free-kick was glanced home by Carl McCluskey.

Town were behind for just a matter of minutes though as Dean Beckwith was felled by a combination of Michael Peacock and Jamie Busby and O'Connor confidently planted his penalty to the keeper's left.

Luton snatched the lead on 13 minutes – but at a price. Curtis Osano's cross was perfect for James Dance to power home a great header from close range, but the midfielder suffered a suspected broken cheekbone in the process and was stretchered off.

O'Connor was then denied a brilliant goal by team-mate Stuart Fleetwood five minutes later.

Cousins' slip allowed the former Rushden player to seize on the ball close to halfway. His zig-zagging run saw him power into the

box before dragging a shot across Sean Thomas that was destined for the bottom corner, only for an offside Fleetwood, in a moment of madness, to tap home at the far post and see his 'goal' chalked out for offside.

Keen to make amends, Fleetwood had a curling free-kick well saved by Thomas, before Town doubled their lead on 25 minutes.

Substitute Danny Crow's cross-field ball was inch-perfect for O'Connor who teed up Osano and, when his powerful left-foot strike from the edge of the area was spilled by Thomas, Tommy Wright was on hand to head into the unguarded net.

On-song Luton looked dangerous every time they attacked and went close again two minutes later.

Fleetwood, Crow and Jake Howells were all involved to set up John Paul Kissock but his first-time curler dipped just over the bar.

Stoppages disrupted the game's flow as Jamie Hand and Kevin Maclaren were booked for a case

of handbags before the break.

The Greens went close to halving the deficit three minutes into the second half when a long throw fell to James Parker and his improvised overhead kick drifted just wide.

A defence-splitting pass then almost played Isaiah Rankin in, while Belal Aite-Ouakrim fired wide as Town struggled to get started.

Having been on top for most of the second half, Hendon were reduced to 10 men when Kevin Maclaren put in a poor challenge on Kissock and his second yellow card was duly followed by red.

A dull second half was finally enlivened when Howells darted forward and slipped in Fleetwood who rounded Thomas and fired into the empty net on 71 minutes as Town proceeded to dominate.

Seconds later O'Connor capitalised on a defensive mistake as he skipped into the box and fired home.

Charlie Henry made his long-awaited first team bow after almost a year on the sidelines as he replaced Hand, while Kissock was just unable to get on the end of O'Connor's driven cross and Fleetwood curled inches wide as Town turned the screw.

Crow seemed to be denied a certain penalty as he was clattered by Peacock and Osano then had an effort parried as Crow couldn't force home the rebound.

Crow tamely rolled at Thomas while O'Connor whizzed across the face of goal with Fleetwood unable to get a telling touch as the Hatters were in complete control.

Henry miskicked when teed up by Howells before thudding a free-kick into Hendon's wall.

Crow couldn't quite head home a brilliant cross by Henry and he then fired well over in stoppage-time as Town easily booked their place in the next round.