

Town need protection

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 1 (0)
Fleetwood Town 2 (1)

TOWN'S stars are in need of greater protection from officials according to star striker Amari Morgan-Smith as high-flying Fleetwood Town bullied their way to a 2-1 victory at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

The Cod Army time-wasted from the off and frustrated the Hatters at every turn.

An incident-packed first half gave way to a lame second as Town surrendered after finding themselves 2-0 down.

The excellent Jamie Vardy was a constant menace and his controversial opener was doubled by Jamie Milligan's second half penalty as Fleetwood's ferocious firepower proved too much for Luton.

Although Janos Kovacs netted a consolation with virtually the last touch of the game, it counted for nothing as Town dropped out of the play-offs and fell to seventh in the table.

Morgan-Smith said: "I thought we did well in the first half.

"I just thought it was unlucky to concede that goal and I think it changed the game.

"They got the goal and all they wanted to do was waste time and they did all the nasty stuff that teams do when they come to this ground and did it well.

"It's unprofessional but you are going to get teams in this league that do that.

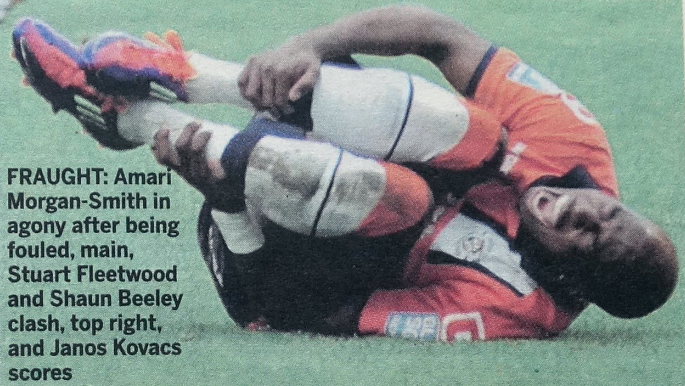
"You've got to take it on the chin and overcome that and hopefully we can take that into the next couple of games."

It was Morgan-Smith who seemed to be fouled in the build up to Fleetwood's controversial opener, with him saying: "It was a blatant foul but I can't comment too much on the referee, everyone knows how the referee did.

"It was a nasty challenge and we were just looking for a bit of protection from him.

"But you can't always complain about referees, you've just got to rise above it really.

Pictures by Joanna Cross



FRAUGHT: Amari Morgan-Smith in agony after being fouled, main, Stuart Fleetwood and Shaun Beeley clash, top right, and Janos Kovacs scores

"It was a nice, fast, quick tempo game and that's what we were expecting from the word go.

"We've just got to overcome those things and not worry about the ref, or worry about teams and just worry about ourselves."

Town made seven changes to the side that had eased to a 5-1 win against Hendon in the FA Cup the week before.

The game started at a frantic pace and the visitors almost took the lead after just 40 seconds, Vardy playing in Sean Clancy who could only fire wastefully wide.

Town's strikers were bright from the off, twice going close inside the opening five minutes.

Stuart Fleetwood's cross to the back post was played across goal by Aaron O'Connor but Morgan-Smith's header ran wide and a flowing break then saw Morgan-Smith beautifully backheel into the path of O'Connor but Scott Davies saved well at his feet.

The lively O'Connor threatened again on seven minutes and could easily have gone down under an outstretched leg as opponents Fleetwood invoked the home crowd's ire by time wasting at every opportunity.

Former Halifax striker Vardy and Richard Brodie looked dangerous throughout and, after Vardy had drawn a rash challenge from George Pilkington on the edge of the box, Milligan's free-kick flashed just wide of the right-hand upright.

The visitors snatched the lead in controversial fashion on 11 minutes when Morgan-Smith was on the end of a crude challenge close to the halfway line.

Referee A Davies waved play on as the Cod Army broke at pace with Clancy playing in Vardy who expertly lifted the ball past Mark Tyler and into the net.

The official was struggling in an ill-tempered clash as it became increasingly stop-start.

An Alex Lawless ball out of defence ran kindly for Robbie Willmott but he failed to connect properly with his opportunistic effort, while O'Connor was crowded out.

Controversy reined on 43 minutes when Fleetwood left his foot in on Shaun Beeley who reacted angrily, but after consulting with his linesman, the referee showed just a yellow card to both players.

Pilkington and Brodie tangled

on the stroke of half time as the visitors were awarded a free-kick and Pilkington fortunately escaped a second booking but did have to leave the pitch until half time for treatment to a facial injury.

Milligan's set pieces were causing problems and, with Luton down to 10 men, substitute Gareth Seddon escaped his marker but his effort ran inches wide of the bottom right-hand corner.

Town should have levelled deep into stoppage time as Morgan-Smith and Fleetwood combined in the box, but the latter's curler flashed just wide.

Both sets of players appeared to clash in the tunnel on their way off as it moved irregularly and a fracas developed inside.

O'Connor had a shot deflected wide in the opening moments of the second half before Ryan Jackson survived a strong appeal for handball in the box.

Morgan-Smith failed to connect properly with a good chance before O'Connor burst into the box and saw his mishit effort smack the underside of the bar and come out on the hour.

Town were turning the screw and Fleetwood saw a long range drive grasped by the keeper, while Brodie's great run and shot drifted inches over Tyler's bar.

Fleetwood sealed victory with their second though on 67 minutes from the spot. Morgan-Smith tangled with Jackson on the edge of the box and Milligan made no mistake, ramming the ball home unceremoniously to Tyler's left.

With the Cod Army defending resolutely, Town struggled to make any impact despite introducing John Paul Kissock and Adam Watkins.

Kissock saw a powerful shot immediately headed behind by Fleetwood skipper Steve McNulty, but in truth Luton looked largely clueless and ineffective as the game limped into the last 10 minutes.

The quiet Jake Howells had a great effort beaten away by Davies in stoppage time and, with almost the last action the game, Kovacs rose highest to power home Howells' cross, but it counted for nothing as the final whistle sounded seconds later.