

MAGICIAN'S

Wonder Watkins shocks Cobblers

By Matt Badcock

ADAM WATKINS was earning his keep on a building site in the summer but now, in the words of the tannoy announcer, "the little magician" is busy firing his boyhood team Luton into the second round hat.

The 20-year-old was brought up just ten minutes from Kenilworth Road and just three years ago was in the stands cheering his side on.

He's even helped the groundstaff keep the Hatters' home race and tidy in the off-season, while this year he was up on the scaffold to top up his pocket money.

Lucky then the midfielder has a head for heights after his superb 80th-minute volley damped League Two Northampton out of the FA Cup. Football's most famous competition has a special place in the heart of the youngster, who joined Luton as a 13-year-old and came through the youth ranks, after making his debut against Southampton in January 2010 as a teenager.

This time he was the main man and it was a gorgeous winner.

A half clearance led to him just outside the box and he made sweet contact with his left foot, watching the ball fly into the bottom corner.

"To get the winner is something special," said Watkins, who is off to Gibraltar with England C this afternoon.

"I gambled on a cross, thank god it came to me, I've caught it just right and it sailed in the corner."

"Not long ago I was in with the fans so I know what it means to them. I'm just as passionate as them. When I score a goal I get a shiver down my spine because I see all the fans going mental."

"I used to help the groundman out to earn some extra cash and this summer I worked as a scaffolder just to keep myself going."

"I'm hoping I won't have to do that for a while. I think coming from that background helps me because I really want to do well for the club."

Manager Gary Brabin was delighted with his side and his little match-winner.

Brabin said: "I thought we thoroughly deserved the win. Adam has been fantastic, everyone knows what I think about him."

"He's got a fantastic chance, but I've got to ask the fans to be patient with him because I don't want him to lower his standards."

"We've got a hell of a player on our hands in the future."

CUP TRICK!

with his magnificent late winner

Despite their Non-League status, Luton came into the game as red-hot favourites against a Northampton side struggling for form, so this was hardly a classic Cup upset.

Arriving with five defeats in their last six games, leaving them hovering three points above the League Two relegation zone, confidence in the Cobblers' camp is brittle.

But they had the best chance of a dire first half. Adebayo Akintunwa peeled off his man at the far post only for Kevin Pilkington to save well from the big man's downward header.

Luton had a penalty shout turned down when Amari Morgan-Smith went down in the box, but their only opening fell to captain George Pilkington, who, eight yards out, headed wide.

Arron Davies, a first half substitute for Lewis Young, curled wide, Kevin Pilkington tipped an audacious chip from Saido Berahino, whose gorgeous finish in the first half had been ruled out for offside, over the bar and John Johnson missed a golden chance as the League Two outfit turned up the pressure.

But their radar was never switched to accurate and they were always vulnerable to the sucker punch.

And Luton made them pay for their wayward finishing when Watkins slammed the ball beyond Sam Walker's reach with ten minutes left.

Michael Jacobs twice went within inches of an equaliser.

First his fierce drive whistled past the post before another long range dipped over.

But in the end it was the Hatters who held on to book their place in the second round, while it was misery for the Cobblers.

Northampton boss Gary Johnson said: "They are not any Non-League side, they are doing well."

"They took their chance. We had several opportunities, but we just didn't have that quality or guile to stick them in the back of the net."

"A lot of them went over the bar or just missed and their keeper didn't have as many saves to make as perhaps he should have done when we were in shooting range."

STAR MAN: Adam Watkins (Luton)
ENTERTAINMENT: ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

"I thought we thoroughly deserved the win. Adam has been fantastic. We've got a hell of a player on our hands in the future."

GARY BRABIN, Luton Manager

"We had several opportunities, but we just didn't have that quality or guile to stick them in the back of the net."

GARY JOHNSON, Northampton Manager



IT'S MINE: Luton's Amari Morgan-Smith takes control