

Wood you believe it Bucks stop Hatters

by Mike Simmonds

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Blue Square Bet Premier
Luton Town 1 (1)
AFC Telford 1 (0)

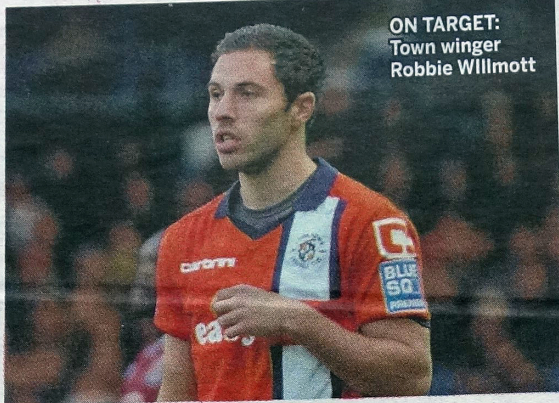
LUTON Town slipped further behind in the race for the Blue Square Bet Premier title after they were held to a 1-1 draw by lowly AFC Telford on a miserable evening at Kenilworth Road last night.

The visitors came into the game without an away league win since the second game of the season, but despite taking the lead and bossing possession, Hatters couldn't force home their advantage to leave the boos ringing round a frustrated Kenilworth Road at the final whistle, with under pressure manager Gary Brabin seeing the boss had made three changes from the 1-0 win at Newport County with Danny Crow starting up front alongside Stuart Fleetwood, while Robbie Willmott and Keith Keane both came into the side as Greg Taylor and Aaron O'Connor dropped to the bench, meaning Jamie Hand missed out altogether.

Town almost made a lightening start to as a stunning interchange between Curtis Osano, Alex Lawless and Crow led to Crow's cross flicked against the inside of the post by Fleetwood and hacked behind, while from the corner, Keith Keane's glancing header was agonisingly wide.

The classy approach play continued as James Dance fed Crow, who slipped in Willmott and his left-footer drew a fine fingertip save from Ryan Young.

Willmott's corner again caused panic as Young's



ON TARGET:
Town winger
Robbie Willmott

punch deflected into the path of Lawless, but his side-footer had too much height. The visitors rarely threatened in the opening forays, until they almost went ahead when a back-peddling Janos Kovacs' header rebounded kindly for Craig Farrell.

The two Pilkingtons combined to save the day though as Kevin slid in to palm the ball wide and from Farrell's follow up, George made a brave block.

Crow teed up Dance for a fierce close range drive that was uneasily palmed aside by Young, while Fleetwood then lashed over from a matter of yards.

Luton continued to press and Dance was a whisker away from connecting with another excellent Willmott delivery, before Osano's chip across goal was headed wide by Lawless.

The efforts continued to fly at Young's goal with Willmott next to go close, side-footing wide of the mark, and then the winger played in Jake Howells, whose toe-poke was deflected behind.

A bodged corner almost led to the first goal as Dance's instinctive cross

was met by George Pilkington, who became the second Hatter to be denied by the post.

There was no stopping Hatters on 41 minutes though when Dance drove into the box and although his drive was blocked it fell perfectly for Willmott to slam home his sixth goal of the season under the advancing Young.

In the second period, Town paid the price for a sloppy start as Lawless conceded a free-kick 25 yards from goal and Sean Newton stepped up to beat Kevin Pilkington's despairing dive, arrowing his effort into the bottom corner.

Kovacs tried to restore Luton's lead instantly, driving out of defence, but his shot flew into the stands.

The home fans started get restless as Osano sent the ball straight out of play, but they were almost out of the seats for the right reason when Crow hung in the air to meet George Pilkington's diagonal pass, only to direct his header wide.

Town hadn't heeded their earlier lesson as Keane gave a free-kick away in a carbon copy position as Newton's

curler was only narrowly wide this time.

Crow sent another effort wide, but Hatters were looking increasingly lacklustre as the match progressed, relying on Willmott's ambitious drives from distance, one being parried behind by Young.

Brabin slowly rolled the changes with O'Connor, Ryan Brunt and eventually Adam Watkins coming on, but the Luton boss bafflingly held his young charge back until the 81st minute with the Luton crowd voicing their frustrations when Crow was surprisingly withdrawn despite the obvious need for a winner.

Stoke youngster Brunt impressed during his brief cameo with some deft touches, sending a daisy-cutter that was scrambled away by Young, before Lawless was denied a certain goal by a brave full-length block from Shane Killock and O'Connor's header was straight at the keeper.

Keane almost salvaged a late, late winner only to see a posse of defenders throw their bodies on the line, but it wasn't to be as Town trudged off, knowing they had thrown away yet another two points in the battle for promotion.

Hatters: Kevin Pilkington, Keith Keane, George Pilkington, Alex Lawless, Danny Crow (Adam Watkins 81), Robbie Willmott, Stuart Fleetwood (Ryan Brunt 71), Jake Howells, Curtis Osano, James Dance (Aaron O'Connor 68), Janos Kovacs.
Substitutes not used: Mark Tyler, Greg Taylor.

Bucks: Ryan Young, Will Salmon, Sean Newton, Stuart Whitehead, Shane Killock, Craig Farrell (Dan Preston 88), Richard Davies, Ryan Valentine, Jay Smith, Ashley Cain (Jon Adams 86), Steve Jones (Andy Brown 81). **Substitutes not used:** Elliott Chamberlain, Ryan Robinson.

Referee: W Barratt. **Assistant Referees:** S Plane and K Howick. **Fourth official:** M Mellor. **Bookings:** Crow 51. Attendance: 5,399 (106 away).

Star Hatters: Danny Crow. Intelligent performance from the recalled frontman.