

Freaky goals hold Town

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@jpress.co.uk
Blue Square Bet Premier

Southport 3 (2) Luton Town 3 (2)

FREAKY goals were the bane of Hatters keeper Kevin Pilkington as Town were held to a hard-fought 3-3 draw against play-off rivals Southport at a windswept Haig Avenue on Saturday.

A massive gust of wind helped the Sandgrounders take a bizarre lead and some haphazard defending led to their second.

A purple patch either side of half time saw the Hatters roar into a 3-2 lead as Danny Crow and Adam Watkins struck to level the scores before the break and Aaron O'Connor then seized on a defensive lapse to put Town ahead.

Luton were subjected to a second half battering as the wind made conditions a lottery and the home side equalised through Kevin Pilkington's unfortunate own goal.

The keeper said: "It was very difficult. All credit to the lads, we've dug in, we've battled and we've come away with a good result."

"Coming from 2-0 down in those conditions and to lead at 3-2, we are disappointed to come away with a point, but it's a good point at the end of the day.

"It's just the manner of the goals. Some days there's not a lot you can do. Freakish, two of the them. It's disappointing.

"The first one the guy's hit it and it looks like it's going in the top left-hand corner. I dived for it and it's ended up in the middle of the goal. The wind's just affected it massively.

"A few of the lads have asked did it get deflected? But the wind's just taken it in the other direction and it makes you look silly. There's just nothing you can do.

"Maybe with the second one we could have done a little bit better defensively. And with the third one it's just a freak. I thought it was harsh to give a free-kick in the first place.

"It's a great strike, I've turned round to see where the ball's gone and it's come flying across and hit the back of my foot and gone in, so it's unfortunate.

"It's the first ever goal I've scored. Again it's one of them things and wasn't going for us.

"All credit to the lads, we've dug in and come away with a point."

Pictures by Simon Marshall



GREAT STRIKE: Although this effort was saved, Adam Watkins scored a glorious goal at Southport on Saturday

The wind dictated the whole game and, with it at their backs in the first half, Jake Howells thudded wide from a clever short corner routine, only for the Sandgrounders to take the lead with a freak goal against the run of play on nine minutes.

Luton were unable to clear their lines and Tony Gray's fierce long-range strike swirled massively in the wind as Kevin Pilkington dived past the ball on its way into the net.

Things got even worse as Southport made it two on 32 minutes.

Janos Kovacs lost out to the hosts new loan signing Vinny Mukendi, who then outmuscled George Pilkington, before confidently curling past the exposed Kevin Pilkington.

Luton gave themselves a lifeline as they pulled one back six minutes before the break.

More good work from the influential Howells saw him tease the ball to the far post and Greg Taylor headed back across for Crow to force home at the far post.

Ex-Sandgrounders star John Paul Kissock, handed a rare start, drove tamely at Tony McMillan before the break and Chris Lever was stretchered off after being caught by O'Connor.

Town equalised with a fantastic goal deep into stoppage time when Howells' dummy was neatly touched on by Crow and Watkins sweetly drove home his fifth goal of the season.

Luton ended the half the stronger and almost took the lead in the seventh added minute when Howells' free-kick from the halfway line caught in the wind but McMillan acrobatically turned the ball over the bar.

Playing into the wind it took the Hatters just two minutes to take the lead as Southport skipper Simon Grand undercooked his backpass and O'Connor rounded McMillan to slide home.

A deflected Mukendi effort Karl Ledsham's dangerous drive were snaffled by Kevin Pilkington, before Grand's measured effort ran inches wide.

Shaun Whalley was proving a constant menace as a number of Southport corners flashed across goal, while O'Connor blasted wide from a rare foray forward.

But Southport levelled in incredibly fortuitous circumstances on 59 minutes.

Taylor was penalised for the softest of fouls on the edge of the box and Gray's free-kick thumped off the right-hand post and back

across goal before deflecting in off Kevin Pilkington's heels.

Amari Morgan-Smith replaced Kissock on 63 minutes and the former Southport man was clearly unhappy as he and manager Gary Brabin clashed on the bench.

A Howells thump seemed to hit a Southport arm in the box with Crow firing wide from the follow-up before Crow could only chip a good chance tamely at McMillan.

Another deflected Howells effort looped just wide on 76 minutes, while Kovacs almost turned a dangerous Whalley cross into his own net. From the resulting corner, Grand and substitute James Ellison somehow combined to head wide from just a couple of yards out.

Kevin Pilkington then kept Town in the game as he did brilliantly to turn Whalley's firecracker over with seven minutes left, but the modest keeper said: "I think from the stands it looks a lot better save than what it was.

"It was quite comfortable and was a save I should be making."

Gray whistled over in the 90th minute, but Luton should have won it in stoppage time when substitute Morgan-Smith slipped Crow through but, one-on-one with the keeper, McMillan saved.