

Stag-nant stalemate

by Mike Simmonds

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Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 0 (0)
Mansfield Town 0 (0)

Picture by Marcus Myers



MAZY RUN: Adam Watkins jinks his way towards the box before seeing his penalty appeals waved away

best to link the attacking momentum with some neat interchanges, but too often Town, who lacked width all evening, found themselves reduced to going sideways as they were far too obvious and predictable in their intentions.

Kovacs spanked a volley against the bar, before heading wide of the mark and Jake Howells dragged horribly off target.

On one of the only occasions Luton worked it wide, thanks to neat play by Alex Lawless and Crow, Aaron O'Connor reached the byline and his pull-back saw Crow's effort deflected behind.

Town had huge shouts for a penalty on 38 minutes when Watkins tricked his way past former Hatter Adam Murray and appeared to be tripped right on the edge of the box by Luke O'Neill, but his pleas

were waved away.

Lawless started to gain possession more as the half wore on, doing his best to run the show, and from one incisive burst, he slid in O'Connor, who was denied by Marriott's legs.

Most of Luton's best chances were falling to Kovacs though and from one wickedly curling Howells corner, his header was inches over the bar.

The second half was, in a word, woeful, as bar Marriott's smart stop from Greg Taylor early on, Luton never looked like breaking the deadlock.

Mansfield on the other hand grew in confidence, with Smith firing narrowly past the post.

Worryingly, with Town waiting to bring Morgan-Smith off, the top scorer appeared to injure himself in stretching to play a pass and was forced to hobble

down the tunnel with Stuart Fleetwood taking the field. Lawless volleyed a Paul Scholes-esque effort from a corner well wide but the hosts finally engineered a genuine chance when Howells dinked a lovely ball for Crow, who couldn't lift his chip over the onrushing Marriott.

New signing Craig McAllister made his debut with 20 minutes to go, but couldn't get his Luton career off to the perfect start, angling an effort wide.

George Pilkington came to the rescue once more on 84 minutes as Green beat Kevin Pilkington to a header across goal. With the ball about to bounce in, the captain used his left boot this time to belt clear, as the Stags players looked to the linesman in the hope it had crossed the line, but his flag stayed down.

From then on, it became a war of attrition, as Luton eventually trudged off knowing full well that a third stab at the play-offs looks the only realistic way they are going to retake their place in the Football League once more.

Hatters: Kevin Pilkington, Dan Gleeson, Greg Taylor, George Pilkington, Alex Lawless, Amari Morgan-Smith (Stuart Fleetwood 57), Danny Crow (Craig McAllister 67), Aaron O'Connor, Jake Howells, Adam Watkins, Janos Kovacs.

Substitutes not used: Mark Tyler, James Dance, Godfrey Poku.

Stags: Alan Marriott, Martin Riley, Matthew Green, Adam Murray, Ross Dyer, Luke O'Neill, Ritchie Sutton, Adam Smith (Lindon Meikle 76), Ben Hutchinson (Louis Briscoe 82), John Dempster, Gary Roberts. **Substitutes not used:** Jonathan Worthington, Anthony Howell, Shane Redmond.

Referee: M Bull.
Assistant referees: D Richardson, T Ramsey.

Fourth Official: A Quelch.
Booked: Riley 26, Roberts 60, Taylor 64.

Attendance: 5,261 (111 away)
Star Hatter: Janos Kovacs – solid at the back.

LABORIOUS Hatters were thankful to skipper George Pilkington for two last-ditch goal-line clearances as they were held to a bore draw by Mansfield last night.

The skipper was on hand to save Town's bacon in both halves, but the result all but ends Luton's chances of mounting a meaningful title challenge yet again, with leaders Fleetwood now 10 points ahead, with a game in hand.

Boss Gary Brabin made one change from Saturday's 3-3 draw with Southport as John Paul Kissock missed out completely after his touchline row with the manager, allowing fit-again Amari Morgan-Smith to take his place.

On a desperately dull evening, Town had the first effort in anger with Morgan-Smith showing good feet to fire straight at Alan Marriott.

The Hatters had an amazing let-off on 10 minutes as Kevin Pilkington needlessly dashed from his line to try and intercept a ball over the top, leaving himself in no man's land when Matthew Green teed up Adam Smith.

The Stags midfielder must have thought he'd scored after curling a first-time shot goalwards only to see skipper George Pilkington scamper back and twist his body marvellously to head clear from under his own bar.

Town were playing all their football in front of the visiting defence as Adam Watkins embarked on mazy run before shooting straight at Marriott.

Danny Crow tried his

Hatt

Kevin Pilkington – Nothing routine save and was rescued by skipper O' line.

Dan Gleeson 5.5 – Plu away all evening looked v

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