

BOOS FOR

Hatters fans hard to impress,



JUST ENOUGH:
Luton celebrate
George Pilkington's
spot-kick winner
PICTURES: Gareth Jones

By Stuart
Hammonds

LUTON beat improving Alfreton to record their sixth win in eight matches and stretch their unbeaten league run to 12 – but still left the Kenilworth Road pitch to boos.

Manager Gary Brabin admitted his side had been "nervous" from start to finish. Some fans voiced their opinion that a more suitable phrase was "rubbish".

But the Hatters' garbage game put three vital points in the Blue Square Bet Premier bin to keep them in touch with Fleetwood and Wrexham, who were both winning elsewhere.

Yes, they had to rely on captain George Pilkington to step up and net the winning first-half penalty after Alfreton keeper Dan Lowson had been controversially adjudged to have brought down Robbie Willmott.

It was centre-half Pilkington's first goal in 58 games, and one supporter moaned at half-time that "Mick Harford or Steve Howard wouldn't let a defender take a penalty – it sums up what a shambles the club is".

The middle-aged guy probably thought he was turning up to an old First Division game, with Brian and Mark Stein the other spot-kicking options. The expectations in Bedfordshire are such.

As it is, Luton have a great chance of promotion. Only it's to escape Non-League football.

They were playing a team battling valiantly to survive in their first season at the peak of the grass-roots game. At the turn of the century, Alfreton were in the Northern Counties East while Luton were in League One. It was probably the last time that particular fan attended a game.

There wasn't much between the modern sides, said Alfreton manager Nicky Law, apart from referee Tim Robinson.

"It's never been a penalty," said the ex-Bradford City boss. "Craig McAllister's said it, their goalie's said it – the referee's parodied with the crowd."

"Before the game I said to him 'Today you're going to have to be a big man, you've got to be strong in front of a big crowd'. He said 'Yeah, yeah, I will be', but he wasn't. He buckled."

Lew's side had made a bright pos-

WINNERS...

Law fumes at ref who 'buckled'

itive start with three up front, although it was Luton's debutant striker, McAllister, who marked the best attacking spell of the game – his 25th minute shot parried by Lowson before Leigh Franks had to block from both Greg Taylor and Jake Howells – before the winner came.

Six minutes before half-time, with Luton upping the ante, Howells played Willmott into the left side of the area and Lowson came racing out of his goal.

Willmott went down, Robinson pointed to the spot and Lowson didn't appear to complain.

"What's the point in complaining? Dan said he didn't touch him, but the ref said he's given it on the goalkeeper's reaction – rules are changing all the time," said Law.

McAllister, the recent sign-

ing from Newport, made an impression with his work-rate and ability to hold the ball up for Luton, but his lack of confidence in front of goal was summed up when clean through on the stroke of half-time, as he lifted his shot high into the away fans.

He might have had his first goal in 11 months on two further

occasions right at the death, by which time substitute Stuart Fleetwood had also wasted a couple of good chances to ease the tension heightened by Jake Moult and Nathan Jarman threatening to nick a point at the other end.

"I thought Macca worked his socks off," said Brabin. "He'll be gutted he

hasn't scored, but he'll get fitter and stronger, and with that his confidence and goals will come."

Brabin's side have lost just once – to League Two high-flyers Cheltenham in the FA Cup – in 17 games since Borefire Night, and he vowed to keep fighting the fan fires.

"We've had a lot of injuries and knocks and still come through the game with three points," he said. "At the end of the day, that's what matters."

"We pride ourselves on our performance and today it's fallen below standard."

"But we've just got to regroup and hopefully next week we'll be back on it with a great performance and three points."

STAR MAN: George Pilkington (Luton)

ATT: 5,695

ENTERTAINMENT: *****

REF RATING: Tim Robinson 6/10

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NICKY LAW, Alfreton Manager



HIGH LIFE: Alfreton keeper Dan Lowson punches clear under pressure from Luton's George Pilkington, right

MATCH STATS

LUTON v ALFRETON

10 SHOTS ON TARGET	1
7 SHOTS OFF TARGET	2
7 CORNERS	4
4 OFFSIDE	3
12 FOULS CONCEDED	15
1 YELLOW CARDS	1
0 RED CARDS	0

LUTON: 4-3-3: Tyler 7, Gleeson 6, Kovacs 7, G. Pilkington 39, Taylor 7, Lawford 7, Williams 6, Frow 44, St. Howells 7, Willmott 6, O'Connor 73, St. McAllister 7, Crow 8, Fleetwood 44, St. Stubs not used. Kossick, K. Pilkington.

ALFRETON: 4-3-3: Lawton 6, Simola 7, Knapton 7, Ffrench 6, Franks 44, G. Young 7, Brown 6, Day 7, J. Moult 7, Arnold 6, Clayton 56, St. Mullan 7, Law 40, St. Jarman 6, Stubs not used. M. Wilson, A. Wilson.