



by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 1 (1) Alfreton Town 0 (0)

TAKING on a team fighting for their lives was never going to be an easy task according to Hatters skipper George Pilkington, who netted the decisive penalty in Luton's 1-0 home win over Alfreton Town on Saturday.

Robbie Willmott won the spot-kick as Luton again missed chances to register a more emphatic victory as they did just enough to edge the first-ever competitive meeting between the two sides.

Pilkington said: "It wasn't a pretty game by any stretch of the imagination.

"It wasn't one of our strongest performances but we showed a bit of grit and determination and by means of a penalty won the game.

"There's a few chances in the second half where we almost play one pass too many or just not quite taking enough care in the final third.

"I'm sure it's something we'll be working on this week in training, but it was a tough game.

"Give them credit, they made it hard for us and were always a threat but we managed to come out on top.

"We played them just over a year ago in pre-season, and they turned us over 3-0.

"They caused us all sorts of problems, bombarded us, and although they've lost a couple of players since then, we knew what to expect.

"When the teams are down there like they are, fighting for their lives, you know you are going to be in for a tough task."

The dogged Blue Square Bet Premier strugglers frustrated Town

for long periods, but victory meant Luton are now unbeaten in their last 12 league games.

A scrappy first half took a long time to get going and, after Alex Lawless had finally tested former Town target Daniel Lowson with a straightforward long-range drive, the visitors almost snatched the lead moments later.

Nathan Arnold jinked past Dan Gleeson and his low effort was deflected over the bar by Janos Kovacs, as keeper Mark Tyler, given the nod ahead of Kevin Pilkington, didn't have to make a save all afternoon.

Striker Craig McAllister, handed his first start since signing on loan from Newport County, did well outside the box and his tame low effort was spilled by Lowson.

Danny Crow was first to the loose ball and teed up Greg Taylor, but his shot was blocked on the line and Leigh Franks deflected Jake Howells' follow-up round the post.

Anton Brown, Nathan Jarman and Jamie Mullan whistled miles wide of the mark, while Town lacked intensity as their fourth game in eight days took its toll on a heavy pitch.

The impressive Kovacs could only head Howells' corner wide with 11 minutes of the half left before Town did take the lead from the spot.

Howells put Willmott through and, as Lowson tried to spread himself at his feet, he caught the winger's dangling foot and referee Tim Robinson pointed to the spot as skipper Pilkington smashed emphatically home.

Buoyed by this Luton went close again on 40 minutes.

Crow's heavily deflected curler was easy for Lowson after good work by Greg Taylor, before the Luton left-back pivoted well on the

edge of the box, but his shot was straight at Lowson.

Alfreton went close when Arnold's thumping left-foot volley fizzed past the post on the stroke of half time, before Luton wasted a glorious chance to double their lead seconds later.

Howells' first-time pass sent McAllister clean through, but with just Lowson to beat, he somehow contrived to loft his effort miles over the bar.

Stuart Fleetwood replaced Crow at the break as the Reds started the second half better, without ever really threatening.

Willmott saw an effort deflected over, while Godfrey Poku was introduced for the ineffective Adam Watkins.

Jake Mould almost shocked Kenilworth Road when his long-range snapshot bounced just wide of the far post, while Fleetwood's fine first touch and opportunistic strike was easy for Lowson at the other end in a largely uneventful half.

Lawless drove across the face of goal with five minutes left with Howells firing the loose ball wide at the far post.

Kovacs gave away a dangerous free-kick on the edge of the area with three minutes to go, but Josh Law could only thump into the wall as Luton survived.

Good work by Lawless saw him fashion a shooting chance for Taylor but his low near post effort was saved before Town broke in numbers in the last minute as Howells laid it across to McAllister but the keeper flung out a foot to save.

Three minutes were added and Town almost made it two, but Fleetwood's strike flashed across the face of goal and McAllister struck wide as Luton held out for a hard-fought victory.