

Nine-man Luton keep Wembley dream alive

by Mark Wood

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FA Trophy semi-final, first leg

York City 1 (1) Luton Town 0 (0)

A MAGNIFICENT, determined and disciplined rearguard action from nine-man Hatters kept their FA Trophy dreams alive at Bootham Crescent on Saturday.

Jake Howells' sending off for handball on the line after only 13 minutes and Jamie Reed's successful spot-kick had left them with a mountain to climb.

Their Wembley dreams looked dead and buried when Keith Keane was dismissed for two bookable offences in as many minutes early in the second half, but Town dug deep to limit City to just one goal, much to the delight of keeper Mark Tyler.

He said: "It's a funny feeling, I thought we put in a great shift.

"Two sendings off don't help, but the lads stuck to the gameplan. We let them have the ball in their half then when they crossed the halfway line that's where we rattled them and the boys did well.

"We're not happy with the result but we are delighted we are still in the tie.

"You don't practise it in training because very rarely do you go down to nine men. When it does happen, everyone gets together.

"Everyone knows the importance of the game. We go to Kenilworth Road, we've got a magnificent record there at the moment.

"We don't fear anyone there and me personally I want to get to Wembley. The whole club wants to get to Wembley and it would be a great day out for the fans. Hopefully we've shown them what we are all about."

Charlie Henry and Adam Watkins were the only changes from the team that lost 2-0 at Wrexham last Tuesday night as Luton

Pictures by York Press



OFF YOU GO: Luton midfielder Keith Keane is shown a red card after two bookings in the space of as many minutes at York on Saturday

included just five players who played in the 3-0 defeat at Bootham Crescent in September.

City threatened in the opening moments before an awful lunging challenge by Moses Ashikodi left Henry writhing on the floor, but the Minstermen striker was shown just a yellow card.

Keane dragged a tame effort wide and Watkins whizzed over as Town looked to shoot at every opportunity early on. Luton's hopes were dealt a blow on 13 minutes when a dangerous corner was flicked on to the back post and Reed's sliding effort hit Howells' arm on the line.

Referee Paul Tierney immediately pointed to the spot and red-carded the somewhat unfortunate Howells as Reed stepped up to beat Tyler from the spot.

A hooked Henry effort was no trouble for Michael Ingham, while a George Pilkington error almost let York in, only for Ed Asafu-Adjaye to get in a telling interception.

York almost doubled their lead on 24 minutes when Matthew Blinkhorn somewhat controversially outmuscled Janos Kovacs and lobbed into the path of Reed who hammered goalwards, forcing Tyler to parry behind.

Looking to play on the break Henry led the charge on 26 minutes and Watkins teed up Greg Taylor, but his angled drive from a tight angle flew just over.

Kovacs won a great header to flick on Asafu-Adjaye's 31st-minute throw but no-one was at the far post to turn home as Luton showed plenty of endeavour despite their reduced numbers.

At the back, Pilkington was struggling for the Hatters, while Blinkhorn spiralled a very presentable chance well over.

York almost made it two with a spectacular effort on 36 minutes as Lanre Oyebanjo's brilliant overhead kick drew a fingertip save from Tyler with Asafu-Adjaye doing just enough to put Ashikodi off, who looked certain to net the

rebound at the far post.

Some beautiful play by Watkins created space on the edge of City's box on 38 minutes and Danny Crow's delightful cross found Kovacs at the back post who could only send his header inches wide, although he could easily have been awarded a penalty as the shirt was almost ripped from his back.

Robbed in possession, Keane was booked on 53 minutes for a silly foul on Scott Kerr and Reed's long range free-kick had to be tipped over the bar by Tyler.

Things went from bad to worse when Keane was shown two yellow cards in as many minutes for catching Jamal Fyfield as Luton were forced to play the last 40 minutes with just nine men.

York dominated from then on as good work by Ashley Chambers ended in Kerr stroking at Tyler before Jon Challinor tested the keeper from range.

The Minstermen twice went close on 73 minutes as Tyler beat away Chambers' driven cross and recovered well to save at the feet of Blinkhorn.

Wave-after-wave of City attacks foundered on the deep-lying Hatters' defence and Chambers' driven cross-cum-shot was just beyond Blinkhorn on 75 minutes.

Gutsy Luton kept going and Crow got in behind on a rare foray two minutes later, but couldn't get a shot away as Luton won one of two second half corners.

Tyler was to the rescue again on 85 minutes when Pilkington's clearance rebounded off Curtis Osano and the Luton keeper adjudged well to save.

Town's players continually threw themselves in the way of efforts as their brilliant rearguard effort limited the Minstermen to a one-goal lead and ensured the tie remained alive for the second leg at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.