

Gray day for Town as Mariners level

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@jpress.co.uk

Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 1 (0) Grimsby Town 1 (0)

THUMPING home on his Luton debut was a dream come true for new signing Andre Gray.

But his instinctive strike on the hour was cancelled out by substitute Kiernan Hughes-Mason's late leveller for Grimsby as the Mariners holed Town's play-off hopes.

Town's disgruntled fans made their anger known at the final whistle with a series of boos and a number calling for manager Gary Brabin's head.

Gray admitted that the late leveller had come as a cruel blow, saying: "If you haven't played so well then you can take a draw on the chin, but playing the way we played I think that was a real kick.

"The lads worked their socks off throughout the whole game.

"For about 70-80 minutes of the game we absolutely dominated and I don't think they had a chance.

"A few of the lads, and me personally, have run out of steam a bit.

"Then they just took the first clear chance they had and it was a shame really. I think that's just the luck we're not getting at the moment."

After a slow start on his Luton bow Gray rose to the occasion and was delighted to net on his debut, saying: "I did have a think about it before I went to sleep, picturing what could happen.

"I think it was a corner. Keane had a shot and I've took a touch and it's come up to my chest height and I think I nearly took (Janos) Kovacs' head off! It was just my instinct to just get my shot off and thankfully it paid off. I was buzzing and the crowd went mad."

Although the striker opened his account at the first time of asking, on a much bigger stage that he had been accustomed to, he thought there was plenty of improvement to me made too.

Gray said: "I did really enjoy myself, but I think I could have done a lot better. First half performance I wasn't happy with. Nerves got to me a bit, expectations.

"But I think second half I settled in a bit more, I knew more what I had to do.

"I think the away fans brought more fans than are normally at Hinckley's home games. No disre-

Pictures by Joanna Cross



WHAT A START: Andre Gray fires home on his debut, above, and then celebrates his goal, left

spect to Hinckley but there is a big difference. You don't really hear it when you are playing and stuff, but I think this is a big step from what I've been playing the last two seasons."

Having signed from Hinckley, Gray was straight into Town's starting line-up alongside Danny Crow in attack. Godfrey Poku also came into the starting 11 as Town made three changes from the terrible 3-0 midweek defeat at Forest Green Rovers.

Luton made a bright start with Craig Disley heading away Alex Lawless' fierce third-minute drive, before Keith Keane tried his luck from distance and James McKeown was forced to smuggle his low effort round the post.

The Hatters were doing all of the running as McKeown showed a safe pair of hands from another long-range Keane effort in what was a largely mundane half.

Keeper Mark Tyler was bizarrely booked for dissent as referee A Davies ignored his assistant's flag, while the only effort Grimsby could manage was Disley's tame header.

Gray headed over before Town should have broken the deadlock in injury time when Robbie Willmott's low cross was turned goalwards by Lawless. McKeown could only parry, but the rebound ricocheted cruelly out of the reach of Crow.

Town continued to boss possession after the break and, after almost getting themselves in a pickle at the back, they nearly took the lead seven minutes in. Gray did superbly to get on to Crow's flick and lift the ball to the back post, but a stretching Willmott saw his effort cleared off the line by Disley.

A long-range Lawless lash was gathered at the second attempt by McKeown, while shoot-on-sight Keane dragged wide.

Town deservedly took the lead on the hour when a corner was cleared as far as Keane on the edge of the box and his low shot into a congested area sat up nicely for Gray who acrobatically hooked home from eight yards.

A double substitution injected some life into Grimsby as Louie Soares and Anthony Elding entered the fray, while the Hatters twice went close to doubling their lead on 78 minutes when Grimsby again struggled to clear a corner.

Gray's up-and-under was palmed away from under his own bar by McKeown and when the ball broke to Keane in the box his looping header, destined for the top corner, was grabbed by the keeper.

The game finally started to open up and Crow robbed Gary Silk seconds later, but his intelligent chip dipped just over.

Grimsby increasingly threatened as Hughes-Mason blasted a good chance well wide and Elding saw an effort deflect off substitute Shane Blackett and behind.

Counter-attacking Town saw Jake Howells' cross just out of the reach of Gray and Luton were forced to pay a heavy price as the Mariners grabbed an equaliser three minutes from time.

Elding cleverly flicked through and substitute Hughes-Mason teased his way past George Pilkington before steering past the exposed Tyler.

Town piled on the pressure late on but it was Grimsby who almost grabbed it in stoppage time as Hughes-Mason broke and, with numbers to his right, Lawless cynically brought him down and was promptly yellow-carded.

Conor Townsend's free-kick flew over the bar as Town's dissatisfied fans made their feelings known at the final whistle.