

Neilson slams poor Town as they buckle under gaze of new boss

BY LAUREN ARCHELL
lauren.archell@lutononsunday.com

CARETAKER manager Alan Neilson hit out at Luton Town's players yesterday, saying don't deserve to be in the play-offs, following their 3-1 defeat at Braintree Town.

Under the watchful eye of new manager Paul Buckle, who will take control of the club for the game at home to Hayes & Yeading tomorrow, Luton Town dropped yet more vital points after slumping to their second successive league loss.

The Hatters struggled against a physical home side, and although Andre Gray cancelled out an early Adam Bailey-Dennis strike, the part-timers sealed the win with second half goals from Sean Marks and a 92nd minute Billy Gibson penalty.

Speaking after the result, which saw the Hatters slip to seventh in the Blue Square Bet Premier table, three points off the play-off pace, Neilson said: "It is extremely disappointing.

"Too many players lost their battles and the goals that we conceded were poor.

"After today's result we don't deserve to be in the top five.

"The only positive is that we only have to wait until Monday for the next game when the new gaffer will be in charge, we'll be in training tomorrow and hopefully we can bounce back straight away.

"There are six games left, and they have to be six cup finals. We've kept saying that but the players have got to show the desire and scrap for it, if they want it.

"The players have to realise the chance they've got, lots of the lads are out of contract at the end of the season and they've got to show they are good enough to play in the Football League and good enough to play in the Blue Square Bet Premier."

Luton made an awful start to the match allowing Braintree to take an early lead within the first five minutes.

As keeper Mark Tyler came out of his goal to catch an incoming free kick, unmarked centre back Bailey-Dennis was able to glance home a header.

However, the lead lasted just two minutes as Gray scored his third goal in three games after a well-timed run



HORROR SHOW: Luton Town Managing Director Gary Sweet (left) and new boss Paul Buckle share a joke in the stands at Braintree before yesterday's 3-1 defeat. In-form Andre Gray (inset) was the only highlight as he netted his third in three games

pics by Gareth Owen

into the area. The ball fell at his feet and he side-footed his effort cleanly past goalkeeper Nathan McDonald.

But the home side caused Luton a multitude of problems and the frail defence struggled to cope every time a long ball was launched forward to the tall strikers Marks and Ben Wright – who had a loan spell at Kenilworth Road in 2009.

Yet again the Hatters lacked a physical edge to their game and were bullied off the ball time and again by a powerful Iron side who had a goal ruled out on 20 minutes. Marks was away celebrating but the referee ruled it out for a push in the box.

It was a let off for Luton, who were lucky to make it to half time with the scores level following decent efforts from Aswad Thomas and Kenny Davies.

The Hatters looked more comfortable after the restart as the formation changed to 4-4-2, with Jake Howells dropping back to a midfield role while the introduction of Godfrey Poku added a steelier dimension to the side.

Aaron O'Connor's six-yard effort should have been enough to put the side in front but keeper McDonald pulled off a fantastic one-handed save.

Braintree took the lead once again in the 70th minute when a free-kick blasted into the area found Marks, and he buried the chance.

A Gibson penalty in the 90th minute then capped off a woeful afternoon for the Hatters after Curtis Osano had scythed down Marks in the box.

The Hatters now face Hayes &

Yeading at home tomorrow afternoon (3pm).

Luton Town: Mark Tyler, Keith Keane, George Pilkington, Alex Lawless (Stuart Fleetwood), Shane Blackett, Aaron O'Connor (Craig McAllister), Jake Howells, Andre Boucaud (Godfrey Poku), Curtis Osano, Andre Grey, Janos Kovacs
Unused subs: John Paul Kissock, Adam Watkins

Braintree Town: Nathan McDonald, Aswad Thomas, Adam Bailey – Dennis, Matt Paine, Jai Reason, Kenny Davis, Sean Marks, Ben Wright (Brad Quinton), Pat O'Connor, Billy Gibson, Dean Wells
Unused subs: Ryan Peters, Pete Haxell, Matt Pooley, Joel Appiah-Kubi