

Blackett "embarrassed"

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@jpress.co.uk

Blue Square Bet Premier

Braintree Town 3 Luton Town 1

EMBARRASSED defender Shane Blackett was ashamed to admit that the Hatters were outfought as they were bullied into a 3-1 defeat at Braintree on Saturday.

The ball spent most of the time in the air at the Amlin Stadium and, although Andre Gray netted his third goal in as many games to cancel out Adam Bailey-Dennis' early header, the Iron sealed victory with Sean Marks' second half header and Billy Gibson's injury-time penalty.

Choked up Blackett confessed: "I'm very disappointed. You come to places like this and we knew what it was going to be like before the game.

"We prepared well and just don't turn up. It's not good enough.

"I'm a Luton player, I'm quite embarrassed and we've got to put it right, take it one game at a time and hopefully get back in the play-offs.

"We talked about it before, we knew it was going to be an ugly game, but go there and win ugly.

"Sometimes in football, especially the Conference, you just have win ugly.

"It's not going to be pretty all the time, one-touch, two-touch passes.

"You've got to hook it on or put your head where it hurts and we

just didn't do that.

"It wasn't one or two, it was more than that and you can't afford to carry that many on the pitch at the same time, you're not going to get the result."

Especially disappointing was the fact that two of Braintree's goals came from set-pieces, with Blackett saying: "We knew they were a big strong team.

"We said about set-pieces before the game, how important ours are and how important theirs are.

"It's not common for us to give away two goals at set-pieces like that.

"We were out-battled, outfought and it's cost us.

"We need to be much better. I can tell you that, the lads will tell you that, the people watching here, 1,000 people, will tell you that.

"We were 2-1 down and it felt like we were 5-1 down.

"We've just got to pull our fingers out, start earning our crust and start doing it for everybody and ourselves as there's careers on the line here.

"The new gaffer's watching and we've got to do it for him as well.

"We've still got the chance to get in the play-offs, we will roll our sleeves up and do it."

Luton made three changes from the team that lost 2-1 at home to York City the week before, with Godfrey Poku moving to the bench and Danny Crow and Robbie Willmott dropping out of the squad entirely as in came Blackett, Aaron O'Connor and Andre

Boucaud for the first game of the post-Gary Brabin era.

But they were behind inside five minutes as a free-kick from the halfway line was pumped into the box and Bailey-Dennis nipped in to beat Mark Tyler to the ball and glance home.

Blackett admitted: "We gave away a free-kick, which we've done numerous times throughout the game, and put ourselves under big pressure.

"I don't know what's happened in the box, they've scored and we're one down already.

"But I thought it was a good response from the lads to get a goal back so quickly and give ourselves a good chance and we just didn't take it."

That lead lasted just two minutes as the ball broke kindly to Gray in the box and he side-footed past Nathan McDonald.

The Iron's burly forwards caused Luton problems every time they pumped the ball into the box, while Town were guilty of overplaying on an unforgiving surface.

Ex-Hatter Ben Wright got the better of George Pilkington but could only fire into the side netting, while at the other end O'Connor headed Alex Lawless' free-kick over the bar.

Gibson's effort from Jai Reason's cross was deflected to Wright at the far post on 19 minutes but he volleyed well over.

The Iron had the ball in the back of the net again seconds later when Marks glanced home a

near-post cross but had his strike ruled out for a push.

Boucaud then felled Aswad Thomas but it was ruled outside the box as Wright's free-kick deflected off the wall and over.

Kenny Davis' phenomenal 30-yard effort was brilliantly touched on to a post by Tyler, but a goal-kick was given, before Reason found Thomas but he could only spiral over from inside the box.

The second half continued in the same vein as Luton reverted to a 4-4-2 formation and should have taken the lead on 52 when a poor back-header fell to O'Connor at the back post but, with just McDonald to beat, the keeper pulled off a fine one-handed save.

Gibson's long-range free-kick was superbly grabbed by Tyler, before the Iron seized the lead back on 70 minutes when a deep free-kick found Marks unmarked at the back post as he glanced his header home.

Town ran out of ideas as Wright forced another good save from Tyler, before the visitors almost grabbed a point with a minute to go when Curtis Osano's low effort was spilled by McDonald, but Gray was just unable to force the rebound home.

The Hatters' misery was complete in the 90th-minute when Osano felled Marks in the box, who hobbled off, and Gibson blasted past the despairing dive of Tyler to complete a horrible day for Luton's fans who made up over half the gate at the Amlin Stadium.