

Halting Hatters slide was no mean feat says Keane

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 4 (2)

Hayes & Yeading United 2 (1)

ARRESTING Town's dire run of form was never going to be an easy task according to combative midfielder Keith Keane as they battled to a 4-2 victory over Hayes & Yeading on Monday – their first win for eight games.

An action-packed end-to-end encounter saw a rejuvenated Stuart Fleetwood cap a superb all-round performance with a brace, while Keane and Andre Gray both netted to make it a winning start for new boss Paul Buckle.

Late goals elsewhere though mean Luton remain seventh in the table, three points off the play-offs, but with games in hand over many of their rivals.

Keane said: "I can't remember the last time Luton went eight games without winning one. It was time to turn it around and I'm just glad it happened.

"I think we've always got confidence. I thought we passed the ball a bit more and when we start passing the ball we look a good team.

"That's when the confidence starts to build up and when you play with more confidence the better you play. I think that showed as the game went on.

"The way we've been playing for the last nine, 10 games, any team in this league's going to be a hard game for us as we haven't been playing well.

"It doesn't matter where they are in the league, we've got to make sure we are at our game and make sure we play well."

Keane netted to make it 3-1 and give Luton a two-goal cushion – something they have been unable to do for too many times this season. He added: "I think that's the main thing. We've got goals in us but at the minute we are leaking silly goals as well, as a team, it's not just the defence.

"But the new gaffer's come in and that's one thing we will definitely be working on.

"Sometimes I think we switch off because we have a two-goal cushion and that's what we need

REJUVENATED: Stuart Fleetwood celebrates one of his two goals at Kenilworth Road on Monday

Pictures by Joanna Cross



to work on.

"Even when we get ahead by two goals we need to make sure we stay switched on and we don't concede. We've still got a few things to work on.

"We are not playing as well as we should be, but it's a start and hopefully we can carry it on."

Following the 3-1 defeat at Braintree Town on Saturday, Aaron O'Connor and Shane Blackett were relegated to the bench and Andre Boucaud dropped out of the squad entirely as into the starting XI came Fleetwood, Robbie Willmott and Godfrey Poku.

United almost snatched the lead on 11 minutes when the dangerous Daniel Wishart turned George Pilkington on the edge area and his fierce drive brought a flying stop out of Mark Tyler.

From the resulting corner a clever routine picked out the on-rushing Tom Cadmore and his low drive was blocked by Pilkington as Town seemed half asleep.

Town seized the lead with a scintillating individual goal by Fleetwood on 13 minutes.

He slalomed past Pele and buried a great shot into the bottom left corner before almost bursting with delight.

Gray then headed Jake Howells cross straight at Steve Arnold before United levelled with Godfrey Poku off the field due to a blood

injury.

A free-kick was pumped into the box and Mark Bentley's near-post looping flick was forced home at the far post by Wishart.

The visitors looked lively going forward as Dan Spence dragged his shot across the face of goal, before Bentley's low drive went agonisingly wide.

Alex Lawless almost teased Gray in as Town got back on top and grabbed the lead a minute before the break when Fleetwood netted Gray's cross with a thunderous volley that went in off the bar.

More good play from the Hatters saw Willmott and Howells link nicely to tee up Gray but the in-form striker miskicked wide.

Luton got the two-goal lead they desperately needed eight minutes into the second half when Fleetwood's intelligent pass found the onrushing Howells whose deep cross was slid home by Keane at the far post.

Undaunted United poured forward again with Bentley's looping header cleared off the line by Lawless before they did pull a goal back on 56 minutes Janos Kovacs deflected a free kick into his own net.

A breathless end-to-end encounter ensued as Cadmore did brilliantly to block Willmott's blast before the visitors almost

equalised in freak circumstances on 61 minutes when Poku's clearance rebounded off Wishart and the back-peddalling Tyler had to acrobatically turn the ball over.

Great work by Fleetwood ended in the unmarked Gray volleying his deep cross wide, before the former Hinckley man then forced a fine stop out of Arnold with his swerving effort.

Luton restored their two-goal lead though on 72 minutes with a fabulous move that flowed the full length of the field.

From a Hayes corner, Willmott won the ball on the edge of the box and Fleetwood and Gray swapped passes before the in-form striker became the first Luton player ever to score four goals in his first four games.

Lawless looped a good chance just over, Kovacs thumped a header wide and Willmott's 25-yard torpedo flew past the upright as Town pushed for a fifth.

Neither Lawless or Willmott could get on the end of Curtis Osano's cross before Fleetwood was denied his hat-trick with five minutes to go when he skirted the edge of the box as his shot cannoned off the right-hand post.

More chances saw Kovacs side-foot Willmott's corner straight at Arnold and Lawless scoop over as the Hatters recorded a much-needed victory.