

Fleetwood doubles up as Town sink the Fleet

Blue Square Bet Premier

Luton Town 3 (1) Ebbsfleet (0)

A QUICKFIRE double either side of half time by Stuart Fleetwood and Craig McAllister's first goal of the season ensured Luton Town earned a confidence-boosting victory over Ebbsfleet at Kenilworth Road last night.

The result saw Town climb back up to sixth in the table, three points behind Kidderminster Harriers, who enticingly are the visitors on Saturday.

Ten-man York's 1-0 win at Cambridge United was the only downside of the evening, as they maintained a three-point advantage over the Hatters, with games starting to run out.

Luton boss Paul Buckle made one change for the clash with Adam Watkins replacing Godfrey Poku who dropped to the bench.

Andre Boucaud and Aaron O'Connor missed out completely, while John Paul Kissock was back amongst the substitutes.

A quiet start from the hosts then burst into life when Andre Gray headed goalwards and keeper Tom McNeil spectacularly turned the effort over the bar.

The recalled Watkins was next to go close, dummieing one way and the other, before shooting over.

Town thought they had taken the lead on 16 minutes when Gray unleashed a rasping drive that McNeil could only block and Alex Lawless turned the rebound home, but not before the offside flag was raised.

The visiting keeper was proving quite a thorn in the Hatters' side, with a marvellous tip over from Gray's angled blast and then using any part of his anatomy he could to block Curtis Osano's fierce effort.

by Mike Simmonds

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Town stopper Mark Tyler showcased his reactions too, getting down smartly to turn Liam Enver-Marum's effort away and then narrowing the angle from a mazy jinking run by the Fleet striker.

Referee R Merchant then made a truly bizarre decision midway through the half, as Fleetwood latched on to Ross Smith's lame backpass and was tugged back by the defender.

The official allowed play to continue as Smith got back to slide Fleetwood's effort off the line, before Merchant called the Fleet defender over, but rather than award a free-kick and send the defender off, produced the yellow card and signalled for a corner.

Town then laid siege to the visitors' goal for the rest of the half, but couldn't make the breakthrough with Robbie Willmott, Fleetwood and Janos Kovacs all off target.

Keith Keane dinked a delightful ball through to Fleetwood whose left-footed volley was bravely blocked by the outstanding McNeil.

Just when it looked like Luton would be frustrated, the deadlock was finally and deservedly broken just seconds before the interval as Lawless' cross rebounded off Gray and Fleetwood battered home from close range.

With the second period a mere 40 seconds old, Town had the all important second goal as Gray burst forward. His cross shot was parried by McNeil, but only as far as Fleetwood who kept a cool head to rifle home his 15th goal of the season.

The reborn striker was full of confidence now, curling an audacious



CONTROVERSY: Stuart Fleetwood lobs past the keeper after being fouled, above, before the same players saves the day but receives only a retrospective yellow card

cious left-footer wide, while he was only inches away from connecting with Gray's intuitive volley.

In complete control, Town played some delightful possession football with the oles ringing round Kenilworth Road and Kovacs almost grabbed the third with a downward header, but yet again McNeil came to the rescue, palming away.

Lawless' luck from range was out with McNeil rooted to the spot, while Fleetwood was denied a first Luton league hat-trick since Mat-

thew Barnes-Homer's on August 17, 2010, when his curler beat McNeil, but not Johnny Herd covering on the line.

Jake Howells hit the side-netting towards the end, before Gray made a complete hash from close range, sending a half-volley wildly into orbit.

With time running out, there was still time for a relieved McAllister to finally break his Luton duck, nipping the ball off McNeil and coolly tucking into the empty net.

Hatters: Mark Tyler, Keith Keane, George Pilkington, Alex Lawless, Robbie Willmott (Godfrey Poku 90), Stuart Fleetwood, Jake Howells, Curtis Osano, Andre Gray (Craig McAllister 82), Adam Watkins (Shane Blackett 72), Janos Kovacs.
Substitutes not used: Dan Gleeson, John Paul Kissock.

Ebbsfleet: Tom McNeil, Craig Stone, Johnny Herd, Michael West, Ram Marwa (Lanre Azeez 14), Calum Willock 62), Ricky Shakes, Joe Howe, Liam Enver-Marum, Ross Smith, Neil Barrett, Liam Bellamy.
Substitutes not used: Paul McCarthy, Ben Adams.

Bookings: Smith.
Referee: B Merchant.
Assistant Referees: A Young and S Feenick.

Fourth Official: A Gillett.

Attendance: 5526 (59 Ebbsfleet).

Star Man: Andre Gray. A real live wire throughout.