

Hatters seize control after first leg triumph

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by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier,
Play-Off Semi-Finals, First Leg:
Luton Town 2 (2) Wrexham 0 (0)

A FANTASTIC all-round display from the Hatters on Thursday night saw them leave Wrexham's play-off hopes in tatters as they beat the league runners-up 2-0 in their play-off semi-final first leg at Kenilworth Road.

Slick breakaway strikes saw Andre Gray and Stuart Fleetwood net first half goals to give Luton a clear advantage they didn't pass up in Wales on Monday.

Fleetwood said: "The manager didn't have to say too much to us before the game.

"He sort of said you know what you've got to do. A lot of us have been in this position many times before and we know what our assets are. We played to them and we were fantastic.

"I think it was an all-round great performance, the crowd was unbelievable.

"Fair play to the Wrexham fans as well, they brought their fair share and made quite a bit of noise as well, that added to it.

"It was nice to silence them scoring two goals down that end, but the fans were fantastic and I think it really lifted the lads and it showed on the pitch as well."

Fleetwood was integral to both goals, creating the first for Gray before again combining with the recent acquisition from Hinckley to score the second.

He said: "The first one I've got on to a great ball from Keith (Keane).

"I've run down the line, he's shown me a little bit of space and I've managed to wriggle inside of him. I've seen the pull-back and Andre finished it fantastically like he does.

"The second one was kind of a role-reversal. A great backheel to



NO STOPPING THAT: Andre Gray blasts home the first

self nine times out of 10 and luckily I've just rolled it past him.

"It was on my left foot so that's the usual corner I go with with my left. There's no point hitting the life out of it, I just tried to concentrate on keeping it on the deck and on this sort of surface it's just going to zip in.

"I was on a decent angle and could see if it was going to hit the post and if it was going to go in so I was pretty confident, but it was nice to see it hit the back of the net."

Fleetwood was always confident that Town would be able to take advantage of Wrexham's pedestrian back line too, saying: "They are not the most mobile at the back compared to me and Andre so we knew that would be a highlight of our play."

Luton made two changes from the team that won 2-0 at champions Fleetwood with Robbie Willmott and Fleetwood returning to the side and Craig McAllister and John Paul Kissoff dropping to the bench, where there was also a place for fit-again striker Amari Morgan-Smith.

Willmott was the provider early on as Janos Kovacs' downward header from his deep corner ran just wide

A poor challenge left Curtis Osano in a heap but nothing was given and further controversy

and referee Darren Bond halted play so the full-back could receive treatment as Jamie Tolley looked to break.

A breathless start continued as Pilkington blocked superbly from Jay Harris before Mark Tyler came to Town's rescue on 14 minutes when Andy Morrell's low drive was superbly turned round the post only for a goal-kick to be awarded.

More controversy erupted as Willmott slipped Jake Howells in and Harris clipped his heels in the box. The referee pointed to the spot but Wrexham were then wrongly rescued by the linesman's offside decision.

Luton deservedly took the lead with a fantastic goal on 22 minutes. Keane's brilliant searching ball was kept in by speedster Fleetwood.

He then did brilliantly to beat his man as he skirted the byline before pulling it back for Gray to thunder home from close range for his sixth goal in 10 games.

After a series of half chances at both ends Town doubled their lead with a brilliant second from Fleetwood on the half-hour.

Alex Lawless broke up the play in midfield and Gray's clever backheel found Fleetwood who expertly beat his man before slipping an exquisite left-foot finish past Joslain Mayebi.

rocking as Willmott's canny curler was deflected behind and the unmarked Howells was just unable to direct Fleetwood's dangerous cross goalwards.

Willmott and Keane both tried their luck before Town almost added a third in injury time when Fleetwood skinned two players but his cute finish ran agonisingly past the far post.

Fired up, the Red Dragons played with more purpose after the break, but still struggled to create clear-cut chances.

Pilkington put in a series of priceless headers, while Gray thrashed over on 53 minutes.

Willmott was a constant threat and he teed Watkins up on 64 minutes but his heavily deflected shot ran kindly for Mayebi.

Pogba was thwarted by the linesman's flag while a free-kick in a good position was smashed wastefully over by Willmott.

Great hold-up by substitute Craig McAllister saw him play in Willmott but his effort was again off target, before Gray's stinging effort from a narrow angle was superbly palmed past the post by the keeper.

Wrexham failed to trouble Tyler from two well-placed free-kicks before Kovacs superbly blocked substitute Danny Wright's effort as Town then broke at pace.

Keane's ball released Gray on the right and he picked out the unmarked Willmott in acres of space at the far post, but his tame first-time effort was straight at Mayebi when he really should have bulged the net.

The visitors almost gifted Luton a third on 84 minutes when Pilkington's up and under was chested back by Neil Ashton past the wrong-footed Mayebi.

Kovacs desperately tried to force the ball home but Nat Knight-Percival somehow got back to deny him on the line.

And Morgan-Smith was introduced for the tireless Gray late on from hold on to triumph 2-0