

Controversy reigns as Luton lose out again

by Mark Wood

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Blue Square Bet Premier Play-Off Final: Luton Town 1 (1) York City 2 (1)

TEARS from Robbie Willmott greeted the final whistle as York claimed a controversial 2-1 victory over Luton in Sunday's play-off final at Wembley.

A dream start gave way to a nightmare finish as Andre Gray's predatory strike with little more than a minute on the clock was cancelled out by Ashley Chambers' cracker before the break.

An offside Matty Blair then nipped on to a long throw at the beginning of the second half to score what turned out to be the winner.

Winger Willmott said: "I was in tears when the whistle went. This year I came here so confident and thought this was our year, but if it's not meant to be, it's not meant to be. We've got to pick ourselves up and go again next year."

"We couldn't ask for a better start. We said if we get at them early we are sure we can get a goal."

"At that point you think it's going to be your day. You are full of smiles and you think you are going to go and grab two or three."

"But York scored a decent goal, give credit to them where it's due, then slack marking again on the second goal."

Substitutes Craig McAllister and John Paul Kissock ended up with head injuries as they tried to force extra-time with headers, while the goalscorer also missed a gilt-edged chance to equalise.

Willmott: "We've had two cleared off the line and we've had two injuries."

"The lads are dying for the cause and throwing their heads in where they shouldn't."

"I don't want to get into Andre Gray or anything, he's been unbelievable since he's come in and scored some vital goals for us."

"It just wasn't meant to be. He's going to miss chances and we're putting no blame on him."

Willmott was pleased with his own performance, especially after being poor in last year's final.

DESPAIR: John Paul Kissock is denied an equaliser by Lanre Oyeabanjo's last-ditch block at Wembley, while a tearful Robbie Willmott is consoled by team-mate Shane Blackett, inset



He said: "Last year I think I was non-existent in the final. I apologised after the game, but this year I couldn't wait to get out there."

"I just had to take the game by the scruff of the neck."

"I had both full-backs in my pockets. I thought I was beating them easily."

Boss Paul Buckle named an unchanged side with only Aaron O'Connor and Kissock replacing Greg Taylor and Amari Morgan-Smith on the bench.

Luton made a dream start when Willmott darted down the left and his clever pass was perfect for Gray to sidefoot home after just 75 seconds.

Alex Lawless, Adam Watkins and Willmott all had efforts as Town maintained their bright opening.

York gradually took control though as Lanre Oyeabanjo poked ex-Hatter Jason Walker's cross wide before Jon Challinor's fierce volley was superbly deflected over the bar by Lawless.

Town then survived shouts of handball against Jake Howells as the ball again ricocheted into the Luton box.

Walker outjumped Janos Kovas on 16 minutes and Tyler had to be at his best to turn the ball over,

while Gray's shot was deflected past the post at the other end.

George Pilkington's challenge on Challinor resulted in a dubious City free-kick despite the skipper's protestations and Chris Smith hooked the ball back into the box for Chambers to ram home the 26th-minute equaliser.

The lively Gray again created space five minutes before the break and, although his shot was spilled by Michael Ingham, City were able to hack behind.

Blair superbly turned Kovacs but strangely chose to cross as Pilkington was able to block before Town broke at pace but Lawless could only shoot straight at Ingham from range.

York were then handed the perfect start to the second half with the most controversial of goals the new Wembley has seen.

A long throw was flicked on at the near post and Blair, more than a yard offside, was on hand to turn the ball past Tyler.

James Meredith's header from a long throw landed on the roof of the net, while a Blair pull-back ran across the face of an open goal with no takers.

Howells warmed Ingham's gloves from distance before Town made a double change on 61 min-

utes, Kissock replacing Watkins and McAllister coming on for Stuart Fleetwood.

Chambers tormented Town's defence before rolling a weak effort at Tyler as York were happy to hit Luton on the break.

A bustling Gray run into the box on 71 minutes saw him hang a cross up to the back post where McAllister was just beaten to it by Oyeabanjo, leaving McAllister with a cut head as he had to be replaced by O'Connor.

Luton were cruelly denied again when Gray made a nuisance of himself in the box and twice fly-hacked at the ball as he couldn't get a shot away from just a few yards out.

Inside the last 10 minutes and Town continued to pour forward.

Curtis Osano danced into the box and his cross-shot was pawed into the air by Ingham and, as Kissock desperately tried to force the ball home, he was denied by Oyeabanjo as he was left momentarily with a bloodied nose.

Walker brushed the side netting with a free-kick and as Town became more desperate they could only manage wayward efforts from Willmott, O'Connor and Keith Keane as York booked their return to the Football League.

Pictures by Jane Russell