

'Tis the season to be Jolley as Exiles show their class



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ATTACK THE BLOCK: County's Michael Smith stops Luton in their tracks

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est on occasions where the television camera crew have been in tow but in a fast start it was the Exiles who showed a clinical touch.

With both teams restricted to pot shots and content to get the heart rate racing in sub-zero temperatures, Newport took advantage of some dreadfully slack marking at Aaron O'Connor rose to head home one of his simplest efforts of the campaign, goal number 15 going in off goalkeeper Mark Tyler who arguably could've done better. However, less than five minutes later and we were level and there was little doubt that the Hatters' effort was indeed a case of 'goalkeeper should've done better'.

It was an horrendous moment for the hosts, Ismail Yakubu leaving the ball to his goalkeeper Alan Julian who tried to prevent a corner at the expense of spilling the ball into the path of Andre Gray who had the simplest task in tapping home.

It was a major blow for Newport, again the architects of their own downfall, but they responded within minutes with a fine counter-

attacking goal of their own.

This time O'Connor was provider, playing his part in a build-up that saw Lee Evans pick a perfect pass for Christian Jolley whose precise finish was too clever for Tyler to continue his amazing goal a game record with the Exiles.

It gave the initiative back to Newport and they ran with it, Mike Flynn volleying wide and O'Connor stretching the Luton backline with some really clever running.

O'Connor thought he should've had a penalty ten minutes before the interval when Ronnie Henry appeared to handle after Jolley's effort crashed back out off the crossbar, but the swashbuckling Exiles weren't through.

Five minutes before the interval they grabbed a crucial third, Jolley's weak cross-cum-shot not troubling Tyler but for a wicked slice off Henry who totally changed the trajectory of the ball in diverting it into his own net.

The Hatters certainly weren't defending like the champions elect some believe them to be – including the bookies – and on the stroke of half time they could've been buried, but O'Connor drove wide after Michael Smith's neat lay-off.

The visitors defending was all over the shop and they resorted to aggressive tactics, a problem when a barge in the back on Julian meant a JJ O'Donnell goal was rightly ruled out.

However, we know Newport don't do dull, nor do

they do assured defending at the present time, Jon Shaw taking advantage on the hour, clipping home from close range after being allowed far too much time and space.

That made it very much game on with the initiative with the Hatters, but Newport fired back within seconds, Andy Sandell's perseverance rewarded as he bounced his way through the visitors, firing home right-footed after Smith's pass.

Just over an hour gone and six goals quickly became seven, intricate build-up from Newport (and more hapless Hatters defending) freeing Jolley who cut back expertly and drilled home Newport's fifth.

It was champagne stuff from the Exiles, ranking alongside the first period on Saturday as their pound-for-pound performance of the campaign.

Promotion contenders? No doubt about it. 'Tis the season to be Jolley after all.

Newport: Julian, Pipe (Minshull 78), Sandell, Yakubu, James (Hughes 46), Porter, Flynn, Evans, O'Connor, Jolley (Charles 85), Smith. Subs not used: Pidgeley, Swallow. Booked: None

Luton: Tyler, Rowe-Taylor, Beckwith, Lawless, Rendell, Howells, Ainge, Mendy (Shaw 46), O'Donnell (Fleetwood 60), Henry, Gray. Subs not used: Taylor, Dance, Brill. Booked: Gray, Beckwith, Henry, Howells.

Referee: Rob Whithon (Essex)

Attendance: 2247 (211 away)

Star man: Christian Jolley

NEWPORT County powered their way back to the top of the Blue Square Premier by thrashing Luton Town and ending their horror run on television.

The Exiles are usually about as convincing on the box as the actors in a low-rent soap opera, yet to even collect a draw with the cameras on them since returning to the Conference, but a splendid display saw them top the Hatters and re-establish themselves as the runaway success story of the campaign to date.

Boss Edinburgh had more than hinted that this would be the game where he broke up the defence that has been almost ever-present this term, following the manner of goals conceded at Kidderminster on Saturday. However, ultimately the boss opted to keep faith in his rearguard and named an unchanged first XI on a bitterly cold evening at Rodney Parade.

Indeed, this was a contest lucky to go ahead at all, with the covers on the pitch barely keeping the frost at bay while a bigger threat lurked, namely a thick fog.

At 4.30pm neither goal was visible from the halfway line and it looked almost certain to be off, but thankfully County's patience in making a final decision paid dividends.

There is no secret in the fact that Newport have tended to play at their very poor-