



STOCKPORT 0 LUTON TN 1

Howells 45



OFF THE MARK:
Luton celebrate the winning goal with scorer Jake Howells, second right
Inset: Jake Howells shoots
PIC: Media Image



SMART START FOR STILL

By Dave Stringer

LUTON had an awful February taking just two points from the 21 on offer.

But John Still answered the call to take up the reins and worked the magic with a win from his first match in charge with a goal seconds from the break by Jake Howells.

Howells had seen an effort from the corner of the penalty area blocked just moments earlier. But when Stuart Fleetwood picked the midfielder out for a second time there was no mistake as he drilled a low shot across the face of the keeper and into the far corner.

The win sees the Hatters nine points from the play-off positions and Still said: "I know we have a hard task and the players know it too. If we show that level of performance and consistency then we will do OK."

"I thought we coped with Stockport's short and long passing game and were good all round today."

Fleetwood's part in the winner made some amends for his earlier failure to convert a penalty. Andre Gray was a thorn in County's side for much of the first half and drew a foul

from Sean Newton for the spot-kick. But Fleetwood opted for placement rather than power and saw Richard O'Donnell choose the right way to make the save.

O'Donnell had to be at his best earlier in the game when he spread himself to keep out a fierce shot from Gray at the near post. But the home keeper needed his defenders to work hard in front of him as Luton had long periods of pressure around his box.

Stockport struggled to get into the game with Jon Nolan making space but scuffing his shot wide and Matty Mainwaring blazing a half-cleared corner wide.

A double substitution gave the home side some impetus in the second half. Newton did well to get in a cross from the left that Hattersley was unable to put away. Then a corner from Newton was missed by the keeper but swung harmlessly beyond the far post.

But it was Luton who continued

to dictate play. And Gray remained prominent until limping off after 75 minutes.

O'Donnell twice had to be alert to keep the Luton star at bay before Gray almost turned provider. A deft flick put Howells clear but the effort was hit beyond the far post with sub Scott Rendell's despairing lunge just failing to make contact.

And there were two further chances for Luton to put the game to bed with Steve McNulty failing to head home a corner and Howells firing over a free kick from 18 yards.

Stockport assistant manager Stuart Watkiss laid his side's problems on the line. "We failed to work their keeper," he said. "When you're on a run like we are you could see the belief drain from our players' faces when we conceded."

"We have a massive seven weeks ahead of us and we have to make sure that the worst-case scenario doesn't happen."

MATCH STATS STOCKPORT v LUTON

0 SHOTS ON TARGET	4
2 SHOTS OFF TARGET	3
2 CORNERS	6
3 OFFSIDE	3
9 FOULS CONCEDED	9
1 YELLOW CARDS	0
0 RED CARDS	0

STAR MAN: Andre Gray (Luton)
ATT: 4,074

ENTERTAINMENT: ★★★★★
REF RATING: Richard Martin 7/10

STOCKPORT: 4-3-1-2: R O'Donnell 7, Halls 6 (Clerk 80, 5), Hammar 6, Tunnicliffe 6, Newton 7, Sheridan 6, Nolan 7, Mainwaring 6 (Hickney 57, 6) Marshall 7, Hattersley 6, Cullen 6 (Whitehead 57, 6). Subs not used: Ormson, Flippola

LUTON: 4-4-1-1: Tyler 7, Henry 7, McNulty 7, Kovacs 6 (Taylor 58, 6), Rowe-Turner 7, Lawless 7, Mendy 7, Smith 7, Howells 7, Fleetwood 7 (Rendell 57, 6) Gray 8 (Walker 76, 5) Subs not used: JJ O'Donnell, Brill