O'Connor strikes against old club to put Exiles in the hunt



AERIAL DUEL: Yan Klukowski wins the ball

By Andrew Penman

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Aaron O'Connor's first And he also made four half strike against his forchanges from last Friday's mer club was enough to seal disappointing 1-1 home draw County's first home win with strugglers Cheltenham since they beat Portsmouth back on January 10.

NEWPORT County AFC re-

vived their hopes of a place

in the League Two play-offs

with a nervy 1-0 win over

promotion rivals Luton

The win leaves County just

a point behind the Hatters

and up to eighth in the table

but they had to hang on af-

ter the break as the visitors

knocked on the door relent-

lessly and hit the woodwork

In the end though they

probably deserved the win

for a superb first half show-

ing and an inspired display

from goalkeeper Joe Day af-

Manager Jimmy Dack

ditched 4-4-2 in favour of a

return to the 5-3-2 forma-

tion that has served County

so well over the last three

ter the interval.

In defence Andy Sandell returned in place of young David Tutonda, although Darren Jones retained the captain's armband, and Ismail Yakubu was also back from injury.

In midfield Max Porter replaced the injured Mark Byrne and Adam Chapman also made way.

And up front, in the everchanging County strike force, O'Connor was this time partnered by Shaun Jeffers as Miles Storey dropped to the bench.

The change in formation meant the Exiles looked more solid at the back and more of a threat going forward but Ryan Jackson was once again the best attacking outlet.

Restored to right wing-back, the former AFC Wimbledon man was a constant thorn in Luton's side and he produced the game's first proper shot on goal after 15 minutes.

He beat Jake Howells and Luke Guttridge as he cut in from the flank but his attempt was comfortably saved by Elliot Justham in the visitors' goal.

Jackson also had a hand, or as bad on the road as County two, in the opening goal as his have at Rodney Parade of long throw found O'Connor in front of goal six yards out.

The striker still had a lot of work to do, however, and he did superbly to steer his shot into the top corner while falling backwards.

It was the least that Dack's men deserved for a spirited start that belied their recent crisis of confidence at home.

They could have been further ahead before the break as Yan Klukowski headed wide of the near post from a Sandell cross shortly after the goal.

That man Jackson saw a drilled shot just about parried behind by Justham and Kevin Feely should have done far better with his header

es away from doubling his side's advantage with a stinging volley at the far post after more excellent work from

late, threatened sporadically but didn't force Day into a save in the first 45 minutes.

Adam Drury went closest with a curling effort from 20 yards that the County 'keeper was glad to see clear his crossbar.

John Still's side also thought they should have had a penalty ten minutes before half-time when the ball appeared to strike Jackson's hand in the box but referee terested.

Having opened the scoring at home for the first time since that victory over Pompey under Justin Edinburgh, County were able to enjoy the benefits of being ahead.

back and would, in theory at least, leave holes at the back

And the Hatters did indeed storm out of the blocks in the second half with Elliot Lee unlucky to see his shot beat Day but rebound off the post

Jake Howells then fired over before Day was called upon to deny Mark Cullen down low at his near post and Lee from a point blank header.

Day was again in the thick of the action as he blocked another Lee effort but he could only look on helplessly as Luke Wilkinson headed

There were opportunities for the Exiles at the other end as the game became stretched and Minshull saw his header well saved by Justham.

Dack threw on troubled striker Chris Zebroski in place of Jeffers to try to exploit those gaps but he was just as effective in defending from the front as County held on for a morale-boosting vic-

County: Day, Jackson, Feely, Yakubu, Jones, Sandell, Porter, Minshull, Klukowski (Flynn, 79), Jeffers (Zebroski, 71) O'Connor (Chapman, 90)

Subs not used: Stephens, Storey, Parker, Tutonda

Booked: Feely

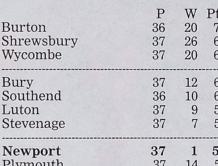
Luton: Justham, McNulty, Lawless (Oduwa, 72), Drury, Howells, Cullen (Benson, 61), Guttridge, Harriman (Franks, 52), Wilkinson, Lee, McGeehan

Subs not used: Robinson. Stockley, Hall, King

Referee: Brendan Malone Attendance: 2,536 (349 Lu-

Argus star man: Ryan Jack-

Newport Plymouth Northampton Exeter Portsmouth



How they stand...

14

62 58 56

Bury Southend Stevenage

CLEARANCE: Skipper Darren Jones nods away

from the resulting corner. And Lee Minshull was inch-

The Hatters, who have been

Brendan Malone was not in-

It meant Luton couldn't sit for the hosts to exploit.

before Feely headed to safety.

against the post.

Booked: McGeehan