

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



AERIAL DUEL: Yan Klukowski wins the ball



CLEARANCE: Skipper Darren Jones nods away

How they stand...

	P	W	Pts
Burton	36	20	70
Shrewsbury	37	26	68
Wycombe	37	20	68
Bury	37	12	64
Southend	36	10	62
Luton	37	9	58
Stevenage	37	7	57
Newport	37	1	57
Plymouth	37	14	56
Northampton	37	8	53
Exeter	37	-2	51
Portsmouth	37	3	49

NEWPORT County AFC revived their hopes of a place in the League Two play-offs with a nervy 1-0 win over promotion rivals Luton Town.

Aaron O'Connor's first half strike against his former club was enough to seal County's first home win since they beat Portsmouth back on January 10.

The win leaves County just a point behind the Hatters and up to eighth in the table but they had to hang on after the break as the visitors knocked on the door relentlessly and hit the woodwork twice.

In the end though they probably deserved the win for a superb first half showing and an inspired display from goalkeeper Joe Day after the interval.

Manager Jimmy Dack ditched 4-4-2 in favour of a return to the 5-3-2 formation that has served County so well over the last three years.

By Andrew Penman

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And he also made four changes from last Friday's disappointing 1-1 home draw with strugglers Cheltenham Town.

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 ever-changing 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 two, in the opening goal as his 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 from the resulting corner.

And Lee Minshull was inches away from doubling his side's advantage with a stinging volley at the far post after more excellent work from Jackson.

The Hatters, who have been as bad on the road as County have at Rodney Parade of 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 Brendan Malone was not in-

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.

It meant Luton couldn't sit back and would, in theory at least, leave holes at the back for the hosts to exploit.

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 before Feely headed to safety.

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 against the post.

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 victory.

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

Booked: McGeehan

Referee: Brendan Malone

Attendance: 2,536 (349 Luton)

Argus star man: Ryan Jackson