

HOLMES RUN:
Cobblers' equaliser from penalty



By **DAVE SMITH** 14/15
at the Sixfields Stadium

THE COBBLERS produced a potentially priceless win against the Hatters, who are in freefall after this sixth successive defeat.

Alex Lawless gave Luton the lead, but, after Ricky Holmes had scored from the spot, Northampton took the points, courtesy of an excellent finish by James Gray.

Northampton are just four points off the play-off places and manager Chris Wilder was delighted with the response of his players, after going a goal down.

He said: "I thought it was going to be one of those days when we got mugged, but the players dug deep and got the result we deserved.

"We have come a long way since last year when we were fighting to stay in the league; now we are fighting to get out of it. It's cup final football from here on in."

On the face of it, this was never going to be a classic, given that both teams were riding the crest of a slump.

Two successive defeats had thrown a spanner in the promotion works for Northampton, while Luton had hit an even bigger brick wall.

One win in eight games – including a run of five defeats on the bounce – left

GRAY'S SHOO-IN FOR COBBLERS

MATCH STATS opta

	NOR	LUT
Possession	53%	47%
Shots On Target	10	2
Shots Off Target	2	1
Blocked Shots	1	0
Corners	4	7
Fouls Conceded	10	13
Offsides	4	2
Yellow Cards	1	4
Red Cards	0	0

NORTHAMPTON: Duke, Moloney, Collins, Cresswell, Newey (Carter 65), D'Ath, Taylor, Byrom, Holmes, O'Toole (Toney 65), Gray (Diamond 90). **Subs not used:** Hackett, Warburton, Clifton, Jalal

LUTON: Justham, Harriman, McNulty (Lacey 57), Wilkinson, Kinsella, Smith, Drury, Doyle, Lawless (McGeenhan 83), Benson, Cullen (Miller 70). **Subs not used:** Guttridge, Stockley, Hall, Gooch

REFEREE: Graham Scott

fans wondering if the Hatters had lost their heads.

After five years in the Conference, Luton took to life back in League One like a duck to water. But it's sink-or-swim time now.

With so much at stake, it is little wonder the opening exchanges were feisty and it was the Cobblers who put the first stamp on a crucial game for both sides.

After Luton's Mark Cullen had almost added to his 12-goal haul, John-Joe O'Toole, Holmes and Joel Byrom all had chances for Northampton before the break.

However, it was the visitors who took the lead

within 39 seconds of the restart when Lawless curled in a delightful shot from just outside the box.

The Cobblers levelled after 64 minutes when Michael Harriman was adjudged to have handled in the box and the game's star performer Holmes scored from the spot.

Byrom, Ivan Toney and Lawson D'Ath all threatened late on for Northampton, but, with the game heading towards a stalemate, Gray (inset) popped up with an 86th-minute winner.

Luton manager John Still, who is coming under pressure from fans, admitted: "It was a dreadful day for us and I am bitterly disappointed."

