

Pools improve but not enough for Luton win

15/16

CRAIG HIGNETT could see the improvement, but unfortunately for Pools, their new boss needs wins and not more defeats.

Just like Pools didn't deserve to lose to Notts County on Tuesday, so they didn't at Luton either.

But more performances like this and they will win their share of games.

They certainly need to as they sit uncomfortably fourth-bottom of League Two.

This display showed Hignett is already getting his ideals and principles across. Pools are playing with more confidence and look more organised and disciplined.

They did control this one, second half especially, for long periods, but were beaten by a goal with five minutes to go.

"It was harsh on us, I can see the improvement in the lads. We have done a lot of team shape, playing without the ball and you could see it today," reflected the manager.

"First half, we didn't keep the ball well today, but we looked organised and solid which was pleasing.

"The shape of the team was

excellent and we worked for each other and we stifled them. They ran out of ideas, second half especially.

"First half, we created chances and should have went in with a goal. Second half, we were really good and controlled the game and the lads said they didn't ever feel under any pressure, we were on top."

In the first half, Pools had the better chances. Goalkeeper Trevor Carson had to tip a dan-

gerous header over his bar, but that aside was rarely troubled.

At the other end, Pools twice went close from similar moves.

Picked out by Billy Paynter after a flowing move down the right, Thomas beat centre-half Scott Cuthbert to the ball but prodded wide at pace.

And Paynter almost latched on to a low Jake Gray ball across the face of goal, inches away from connecting inside the six-yard area.

At the start of the second half, home midfielder Cameron McGeehan charged forward from deep, skirted around the defenders and looked a certain scorer only to push his finish wide.

Next time he was presented with a chance, he didn't miss.

A free-kick from 20 yards struck the defensive wall, referee Andy Davies harshly ruling that Nicky Featherstone handled in the area.

McGeehan sent Carson the wrong way from the spot.

But Pools soon levelled - Gray's high corner was met by Adam Jackson, the centre-half heading in his second goal in a week.

Pools then controlled possession and the pace of the game, but without testing the shaky home goalkeeper.

The Hatters' game plan was reduced to launching long balls from back to front which were dealt with trouble free.

But then they were caught out by one and Craig Mackail-Smith, the home substitute lobbed the ball over Carson.

Hignett added: "The referee was really poor. I asked about the penalty - he said 100 per cent penalty that it hits Nicky Featherstone on the forearm. It didn't, I've seen it and it hits him on the elbow

"It was harsh to say the least. I felt then he was giving them everything and Billy is getting pulled all over and gets nothing.

"We fell behind and reacted well by scoring. Good movement, he attacked it well and I felt at 1-1 only one team was going to win it."

HARTLEPOOL RATINGS

TREVOR CARSON 6

Lobbed for the winning goal, but couldn't do anything about it

CARL MAGNAY 7

Determined at right-back, and helped keep possession

MATTHEW BATES 7

Another solid and comfortable game at the back

ADAM JACKSON 7

Two goals in three games for the on-loan defender

JAKE CARROLL 6

Didn't let much get past him on this occasion

NICKY FEATHERSTONE . 8

Praised by Hignett as he knitted Pools together

BRAD WALKER 7

Grew into the game as it went on and looked good

LEWIS HAWKINS 7

Suited to playing in the middle rather than out wide

JAKE GRAY 7

Always a danger pressing on

BILLY PAYNER 7

Showed his experience up top in a battle

NATHAN THOMAS 6

Almost scored first-half with close-range effort

SUBS: OATES (for Thomas 85)

NOT USED: Harrison, Bingham, Bartlett (GK), Fenwick, Richards, Laurent.

BOOKED: Thomas (foul, 45)

LUTON TOWN: Tyler; O'Donnell (Mpanzu 85), Cuthbert, Sheehan, Howells; Lawless (Hall 72), McGeehan, Lee; Green, Piggot (Mackail-Smith 80), Marriott. **NOT USED:** Smith, McCourt, Justham (gk), Okuonghae.

BOOKED: Lee (foul 63), McGeehan (foul 64)

REFEREE: Andy Davies (Southampton)