

Dunstable Gazette

Established 1891 Wednesday April 8 2009 45p

SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE WEMBLEY SUPPLEMENT - YOUR FAVOURITE NEWSPAPER IS INSIDE

Glossy finish to cup classic

NEUTRALS have described it as the greatest game to grace the new Wembley stadium.

And Luton Town's army of 40,000 magnificent fans certainly won't be arguing with that assessment after witnessing the Hatters' superb 3-2 victory over Scunthorpe in the final of the Johnstone's Paint Trophy.

Sunday's classic encounter saw Town upset the odds to beat their higher league opponents.

And after all the heartache of recent months and years, it made the taste of success even sweeter.

Witnessing the sea of orange and white-clad Luton supporters at Wembley made all the hard work of new owners LTFC2020 in rescuing the club from administration worthwhile, according to director Stephen Browne.

He said: "Everything we have

tried to do has come to fruition in the end. It was emotional for a lot of people.

"For us sitting and looking at the orange and white it was stunning."

And he was delighted with the way Luton's supporters backed the club on the day.

"I just thought it was fantastic. Having been to the World Cup in 2006 the whole atmosphere and the way the fans were dressed up - it was completely reminiscent of following England in Germany.

"The community turned out in force and it was absolutely brilliant."

"It was a weird occasion, as in some ways it meant more than previous occasions at Wembley, even though the trophy is not held in such high esteem as the other cups we have fought for there."



EMOTIONAL: Director Stephen Browne



WHAT A FEELING: Luton Town manager Mick Harford shows off the Johnstone's Paint trophy



CONGRATULATIONS

For bringing us sunshine on such a historic day

From all your friends all over the world at Loyal Luton Supporters Club

www.loyalluton.com



LUTON TOWN 3 SCUNTHORPE 2 (after extra-time)

MATCH ANALYSIS



Referee: Phil Crossley (Kent)
Attendance: 55,378

how the game unfolded

	Hatters	Iron
Shots on target	9	13
Shots off target	2	8
Hit woodwork	0	1
Corners	8	9
Free-kicks	16	11
Offsides	3	1

Shades of '88 as

THERE were more than just a few shades of Luton's famous Littlewoods Cup victory in 1988 as they came from behind to beat Scunthorpe United 3-2 in the Johnstone's Paint Trophy final, writes Mark Wood.

In a thrilling Wembley finale, the steely Hatters gave as good as they got against their League One rivals, as they came from a goal down to defeat the stylish Iron.

Substitute Claude Gnakpa proved to be Hatters' hero with his extra-time winner, while hotshots Chris Martin and Tom Craddock found the net in normal time.

Town's raucous 40,000 following gave their side plenty of support, and Luton's players responded in full with a gritty performance filled with quality.

After Football League chairman Lord Brian Mawhinney had walked out to a torrent of boos from Hatters' massed ranks of supporters, Scunthorpe bossed the first 20 minutes of this topsy-turvy encounter.

Matt Sparrow's low effort forced a good save out of Dean Brill on five minutes, but against the run of play Luton should have taken the lead on 10 minutes.

Kevin Nicholls' corner was touched on at the front post and a giant scramble in the Iron goal-mouth ensued. Some brave keeping from Joe Murphy just kept out Martin's close-range effort and neither George Pilkington or Asa Hall were able to force the ball home.

Grant McCann warmed Brill's



WE'VE DONE IT: Chris Martin and his Luton team-mates celebrate their great victory

gloves with a long-range free-kick before the Iron snatched the lead on 14 minutes, when their deadly duo of Paul Hayes and Gary Hooper combined to great effect.

Hayes' flick-on ran perfectly for an offside-looking Hooper, who eluded Pilkington before firing into the bottom corner.

Pilkington denied Hooper moments later, before Nicholls somehow popped up on the Luton line to head Henri Lansbury's pilerdriver from just inside the box over the bar.

Town began to work their way back into the game and twice went close in the matter of a minute.

First Rossi Jarvis won a brave tackle against Marcus Williams, before slipping through a lovely ball for Craddock. The former Middlesbrough man looked to have got the better of David Mirfin before he was felled in the box but, despite a close look, Kent referee Phil Crossley gave nothing.

Martin's fine run and shot almost created an opening seconds later when Jarvis' clever touch put in Hall, but his shot was deflected over the bar.

The game was being played at an unrelenting pace, and Brill did well to turn Williams' 26th-minute effort round a post before the Hatters deservedly levelled six minutes later.

Jarvis' superb crossfield pass picked out Craddock on the left, and he showed great vision to dink his pass into the path of the onrushing Martin, who did wonderfully to shrug off Iron captain Cliff Byrne, before rolling the ball home.

Michael Spillane flicked a header straight at Murphy before Town got a huge let-off when Craddock slapped Byrne off the ball.

The Iron captain dramatically collapsed on the halfway line, but luckily for

Luton none of the officials saw the incident as the two sides went in level-pegging at the break.

Martin messed up a spectacular attempt at a bicycle kick four minutes after the break, following good work by Lewis Emanuel and Jarvis, while Krystian Pearce stabbed a good chance just wide on 54 minutes.

With Town defending deep, Craddock looked increasingly isolated until his deadly intervention on 70 minutes.

Martin's cross from the left was cleared only as far as Craddock on the edge of the area, who somehow squeezed home a pinpoint shot past Murphy and just inside the right-hand post.

United poured forward with Lansbury thumping the bar with 10 minutes left.

However, the Iron forced the game into extra-time with two minutes left when the impressive McCann let fly with a dazzling, dipping effort that beat Brill from 25 yards out.



GOAL! Tom Craddock gets set to strike home Luton's second

Nicholls' late free-kick failed to find a winner, before French substitute Gnakpa shone in extra-time.

Having missed a gilt-edged opportunity two minutes in, when Nicholls' pass put him clean through, he made amends three minutes later when he beat Williams to Keith Keane's through ball and lobbed the stranded Murphy from the edge of the area.

United desperately tried to find a way back into the game, with McCann curling a well-placed free-kick wildly over as Town were happy to sit deep and soak up the pressure.

Keane threatened on the break, while Lansbury flashed a shot between Brill and his near post and across the face of goal.

But the game swung in Luton's favour when Mirfin was stretched off late on after clashing with Gnakpa and, with United having used all of their subs, they were forced to play the final minutes with 10 men as the Hatters claimed a memorable victory.

Hatters triumph



ON ITS WAY: Substitute Claude Gnakpa stretches to score the decisive goal



CRUCIAL EQUALISER: Striker Chris Martin, above, gets Town back on level terms in the first half and is then mobbed, right, by his delighted team-mates

Close shave for Mick, but who'll dare pin him down?

ECSTATIC Hatters boss Mick Harford revealed that winning the Johnstone's Paint Trophy could prove to be a real close shave for him.

Foolishly, he promised his charges he would have his head shaved if they won against Scunthorpe United, after midfielder Rossi Jarvis led the way with a skinhead cut.

However, after seeing his side triumph in a fantastic game 3-2, Mick challenged his players to try to make him fulfil his promise.

He said: "I did promise to shave my hair if we won the game, but thankfully the clippers weren't working."

"I said if we won I will have mine done and obviously someone heard me."

"They will have to pin me down, I wouldn't like to be the first one who came in to do it. We will do a number four or five."

Town celebrated their victory at Luton Hoo and Harford continued: "We will go there and have a celebratory evening. It's a fantastic achievement in my opinion for the club and the team."

And he was full of hope for the future after the victory, saying: "What does it mean to the club is the most important question. Hopefully this is the start of a new era for Luton Town, though we have had it hard and tough."

"There's a new generation here today and a lot of children here today."

"Hopefully after seeing the performance and the atmosphere that was created it will be in their blood forever."

Town took the largest-ever number of children to the new Wembley for the game and Harford was full of praise for Town's 40,000 travelling fans.

He said: "I thought the crowd were fantastic with the way they showed their protests. Myself and the players and the staff have to be



bigger than that.

"They are the best fans in the country and they proved it again."

"The players and fans were exceptional. It was a great day in the history of Luton Town Football Club."

And Harford, who was more animated on the touchline than he has been all season, admitted that the occasion and achievement may even surpass his England exploits and Littlewoods Cup victory with the Hatters in the standout moments of his career.

He said: "Does it beat my day? I think some of the quality of the football was exceptional. It's quite bizarre teams in League One and League Two can play football like that."

"It's right up there with my great-

est achievements in football and when I look back in a few years it could be the greatest achievement in my career."

Luton may still be struggling to stave off relegation out of the Football League, but Harford believes he and his players can still enjoy lifting the cup.

He said: "I think we can separate it. I think it's a different competition. We know what we've got today. Football League status at the moment is out of our hands. We could win every game and still get relegated."

"The players have put their careers on the line for Luton Town. They could be non-league players at the end of the year."

"I thought it was a magnificent team performance and the three in midfield scrapped away."

And he admitted that the game conjured up memories of Town's legendary 3-2 victory against Arsenal in the Littlewoods Cup final in 1988.

He said: "I thought of that on the touchline, especially when we went two each."

"We knew it could go the 120 minutes, which we did. I think it showed in our performance and the way we tried to play football."

Harford praised the quality of all the goals, especially Grant McCann's 88th-minute equaliser that took the game into extra-time. He said: "I thought it was a brilliant goal. He has a wand of a left foot."

"That would have graced any game - it was unstoppable."

And while he admitted he could have regretted substituting star striker Tom Craddock for Claude Gnakpa towards the end of normal time, he was just grateful things turned out right in the end.

Harford added: "It worked in our favour with Claude getting the third goal."

"He can do that and break forward. It was a good ball from Keith Keane and he finished it off well."

'Clearance off the line was a key moment'

MAGNANIMOUS Iron boss Nigel Adkins paid tribute to the Hatters after his side lost 3-2 in extra-time in the final of the Johnstone's Paint Trophy at Wembley on Sunday.

Having dominated the early stages, he believed that Kevin Nicholls' goal-line headed clearance from Henri Lansbury galvanised the Town.

He said: "I thought we played ever so well for the first 20 minutes."

However, as the game wore on he believes his side dropped back too deep.

Adkins continued: "Everyone is very low at this moment in time. "There were a few tears in some of the younger players' eyes."

But the Iron boss denied underestimating the Hatters and praised Town boss Mick Harford and his side.

He said: "We have not performed to the levels we would have liked to have done, but credit to Luton Town and Mick Harford and his team, it's a great victory for them."

"We've watched them seven times and I've watched them myself and done a lot of homework on them."

"I think you have got to give them a lot of credit and it's well done to Luton Town."

On the clash between Tom Craddock and Cliff Byrne, which left the Iron skipper on the floor, Adkins added: "I haven't seen any clip of it. I'd turned round to have a drink at the time."

STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS!

CAMDEN'S ARE CLOSED!!!

THERE IS HELP!

SLIP END CITROEN

We are celebrating 30 years of great service this year so come and talk to a family business where customers come first and service is our business.

If you are currently looking for a new or a pre registered vehicle contact us immediately and you will be amazed at what we can offer.

YOU CAN'T BEAT SLIP END CITROEN FOR GREAT SERVICE, SENSIBLE PRICES AND RELIABLE ADVICE

SLIP END GARAGE

MARKYATE ROAD - SLIP END - LUTON - LU1 4BU

08450 202338

www.slipendgarage.co.uk

Prestige Design & Workwear Ltd



Personalised embroidery and Screen printing to all types of garments!

A full range of personal protective equipment is also available!

At prestige we can do it all from personalising garments bought from us, using your logos to screen printing all types of garments from work wear, leisure wear to school uniforms!

From footwear to Ear and Eye protection we have it all! We supply, Print and Embroider Football Kits.

For more information please call on 01582 883222 Fax: 01582883622 or e-mail

sales@prestigedesignnw.co.uk www.prestigedesignnw.co.uk or come in and see us at

Unit 2, Barton Industrial estate, Barton Le Clay, Beds MK45 4RP

www.lutontoday.co.uk

www.dunstabletoday.co.uk

www.lutontoday.co.uk

www.dunstabletoday.co.uk

www.lutontoday.co.uk

www.dunstabletoday.co.uk

Come and try our
NEW light Lunch menu
and receive a FREE*
glass of wine or beer!



Bar Thirty Eight, 40A Gailford Street, Luton, LU1 2PA. Tel. 01582 870990



*To receive your FREE glass of wine or beer please print and complete this form and present on arrival to thirty eight

Name: _____ Email Address: _____
Address: _____
Post Code: _____

www.thirtyeight.co.uk

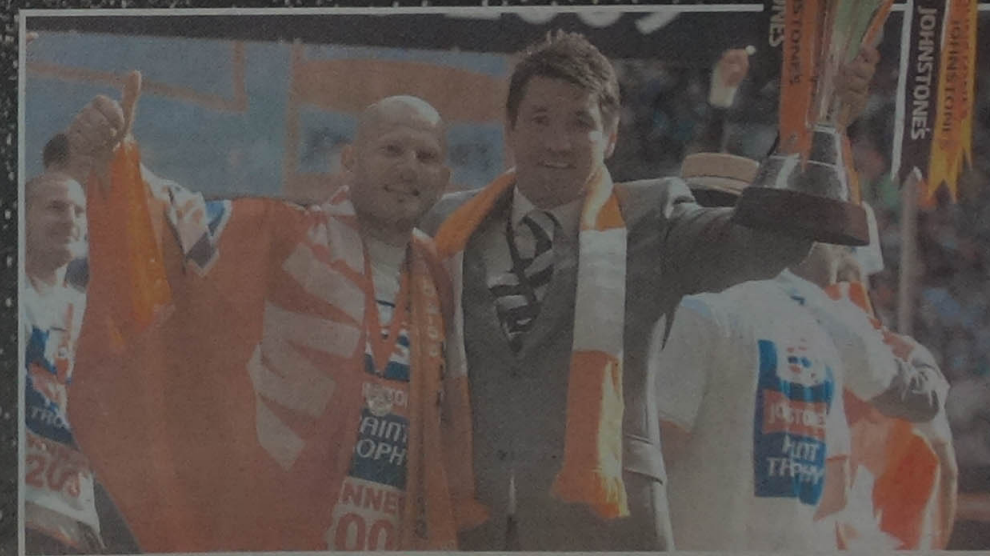


Luton Town FC

Johnstone's Paint Trophy winners 2009

Commemorative
poster brought
to you by

The Luton News
Dunstable Gazette



SCUNTHORPE RATED

Joe Murphy: 7 – Excellent distribution and handling. No real chance with all three Luton goals.

Cliff Byrne: 6 – Given plenty of work to do by Chris Martin. Caught napping for the equaliser.

Marcus Williams: 7 – Solid performance by the left-back. Good pace to keep Rossi Jarvis in check, but Claude Gnackpa's fresh legs outdid him for the decisive goal in extra time.

Kristian Pearce: 7 – Crucial goal-line clearance in first half and had a good tussle with Tom Craddock.

David Mirfin: 6 – Perhaps lucky not to concede a penalty, but gave a solid enough performance until stretched off late on.

Matt Sparrow: 6 – Solid if unspectacular stint in the middle of the park.

Henri Lansbury: 6 – Not in action as often as fellow winger Kevan Hurst. Almost scored a fantastic goal and perhaps should've done better when he rattled Dean Brill's crossbar.

Grant McCann: 7 – Some decent touches. Good battle with Kevin Nicholls in midfield and produced a superb finish for the second goal.

Kevan Hurst: 7 – Dangerous outlet for the Iron on the left-hand side. Kept Michael Spillane busy until being substituted with 25 minutes left.

Paul Hayes: 7 – Linked well with Gary Hooper up front. A constant menace, although his influence waned as the game wore on.

Gary Hooper: 7 – Took the opening goal well and combined superbly with Hayes. As with his strike partner, became less influential in the latter stages.

Sam Togwell (sub): 6 – Replaced the dangerous Kevan Hurst, but didn't have the same impact.

Martyn Woolford (sub): 6 – Late introduction. Kept the Iron on the front foot as they searched for an equaliser.

Andrew Wright (sub): 6 – Given five minutes at the end of normal time and provided some useful fresh legs for the additional 30 minutes.

Ratings by Alec Swann

They're all heroes

They all played their part, but Alec Swann picks out the top Hatters at Wembley



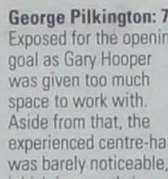
Dean Brill: 7 – The busier of the two keepers. Brill has been in excellent form since being recalled to the Hatters' line-up. His composure when put under pressure was exemplary and his kicking was good. Made a couple of crucial saves to prevent Scunthorpe from taking control. Couldn't really do anything about the goals.



Michael Spillane: 7 – Had his hands full with enterprising left midfielder Kevan Hurst, but coped pretty well. Tried to get forward at every opportunity. Spillane has been one of the standout performers this season and this was another example of his growing maturity. Certainly destined for greater things.



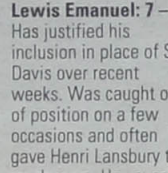
Keith Keane: 8 – The most defensive of the three-man midfielders with Kevin Nicholls and Asa Hall operating in more advanced roles. Keane is more at home in the back four, but Michael Spillane's inclusion necessitated a change in position in which he performed admirably. Required all of his defensive nous in the second half and made a few timely challenges.



George Pilkington: 7 – Exposed for the opening goal as Gary Hooper was given too much space to work with. Aside from that, the experienced centre-half was barely noticeable, which is a good sign that he was doing his job well.



Kevin Nicholls: 7 – A full-blooded challenge early on signalled the captain's intent and his headed goal-line clearance to deny Henri Lansbury was exceptional. Has a habit of following through when flying into tackles and earned himself a yellow card for an overly-aggressive challenge. His set-piece delivery was good, but some of his passing in normal play was of the hit and hope variety. Commitment was as whole-hearted as ever.



Lewis Emanuel: 7 – Has justified his inclusion in place of Sol Davis over recent weeks. Was caught out of position on a few occasions and often gave Henri Lansbury too much room. However, he tidied up well when required and rarely looked flustered with the ball at his feet.



Asa Hall: 6 – As has often been the case, struggled to get into the game for long periods. When he did burst into life he made a number of dangerous forays forward. Was generally required to live off scraps just behind Tom Craddock.



Rossi Jarvis: 7 – Playing wide on the right, came more into proceedings as the game progressed. Lacked the pace to go past Marcus Williams and had to rely on his distribution which, for the most part, was pretty good.



Ed Asafu-Adjaye: 7 – Formed a decent partnership with Pilkington in the heart of the defence. Often looks nervous in possession, but evidently grew in confidence as the game went on.



Chris Martin: 7 – Saw plenty of the ball in the early stages. Has looked uncomfortable on the left wing in his past few appearances, but gave Cliff Byrne lots to think about all afternoon. Held the ball up well and supplied clinical finish for the equaliser.



Tom Craddock: 9 STAR HATTER – The decisive factor. The ex-Middlesbrough man has been the Hatters' main attacking threat and the same was true at Wembley. His pass to Martin for the equaliser was perfectly weighted and showed just what he is capable of. Took his goal exceptionally well and his build-up play was also of a high standard. Excelled on the biggest stage and it would be a major surprise if he is not plying his trade at a higher level next season. Lucky that no-one seemed to see his slap on Cliff Byrne. Became exposed in the second half as Hatters were forced to defend in numbers.



Claude Gnackpa (sub): 7 – Late substitute for the exhausted Craddock. Required to hold the fort. Missed a great chance early in extra-time when he was foiled by the covering defence, but made up for it minutes later with the winner.



Sam Parkin (sub): 6 – A pair of fresh legs for the last five minutes. Little opportunity to make a significant difference, but held the ball up well when required.



THEY HELPED MAKE HATTERS HISTORY BY SCORING AT WEMBLEY... WE INTERVIEW CLAUDE GNACKPA, TOM CRADDOCK AND CHRIS MARTIN



HEROES: Claude Gnackpa on the gallop, main picture, and Chris Martin after scoring

If at first you don't score... try again!

A WINNING goal at Wembley was just the tonic subscub Claude Gnackpa needed for a frustrating season, writes Mark Wood.

The unpredictable Frenchman scored an injury-time winner for the Hatters in their 3-2 Johnstone's Paint Trophy final defeat of League One Scunthorpe, and the 25-year-old admitted he was living the dream after netting the decisive goal.

He said: "This season I've had a difficult time. I played all the games at the start, but since December and January I've struggled to get in the team and the gaffer hasn't given me many opportunities to play. But I keep working hard in training because I'm professional and I love Luton."

"To come in and score the winning goal is great."

"I've got my family in the stand. My mum and dad and my

friends came from France to see me play."

"One of my friends was crying. He was saying: 'You can't make me cry'. It's unbelievable. I want to thank him, Ivan."

"I want to say thank you very much. When I was down and not playing he helped me a lot, and thank you to my family."

The matchwinner also revealed he has never stopped believing in himself, despite being reduced to a bit-part role since Christmas.

He said: "Today it is still a dream and this dream came true and it's great."

Moments before his goal, Gnackpa had missed a great chance to give the Hatters the lead, but he stuck to his task and it paid dividends.

Gnackpa continued: "From the bench I saw how good the football was and we were doing well."

"When they scored we reacted very well and scored again."

"I believed in me and the team and, when Nico gave me the first pass I didn't score, but I kept believing because I knew today was the final and we had to win."

"When the second opportunity came the left-back was in front of me, but I said to Claude you have to believe, you have to believe and I scored."

And he admitted the importance of his strike, which will put him forever in the annals of Luton's history, is probably yet to hit him.

He continued: "Maybe in the years after I can realise the impact."

"I couldn't believe I scored and I'm very, very happy."

"I can't believe we won the game. Today I think the team deserved to win the game because we played very well."

"It's a big party tonight and a good glass of red wine."

And on the phenomenal atmosphere generated by Luton's

fans, he added: "To see 40,000 fans when you play weekends with 6,000 Luton fans, it's unbelievable. Unbelievable."

"When I score I think about my family, but I think about the fans because they didn't deserve the 30 points."

'I just wanted to carry on running'

WEMBLEY proved to be an "unreal" experience for Town's top scorer Chris Martin, writes Mark Wood.

The on-loan Norwich City striker grabbed his 13th goal of the season in the Johnstone's Paint Trophy final against Scunthorpe to level the scores at 1-1.

On his goal, he said: "I just made my run inside and lucky enough for me the full-back didn't read it. As soon as I saw the ball hanging there I thought 'get a touch and you're in on goal' and thankfully I got a touch and it went in the corner."

"I just wanted to carry on running all over the place, but luckily the lads grabbed hold of me. The feeling was just unreal."

But he admitted that winning the Johnstone's Paint Trophy was far more important than individual glory.

The 20-year-old said: "It was nice to score at Wembley, but it was important we got the right result. I think they started very well and they are a good side and they proved it today, but the lads' spirit was unbelievable."

"It was a great show for the fans. It was unreal. Obviously the manager and the coaches were trying to shout instructions on, but we couldn't even hear each other."

"It was unreal the amount we had there and the amount of noise they made."

But Martin admitted that he was nervous about the result towards the end of extra-time.

He continued: "Is it going to be the same story again? But the defence showed great spirit and great determination and shut them out towards the end."

The young striker also praised matchwinner Claude Gnackpa, saying: "Claude did very well when he came on. He has been in and out of the team this season, but he showed what he can do today."

All the players were shattered after 120 minutes of football, but he revealed that Luton's 40,000 fans made for an intoxicating atmosphere.

He added: "It was tough to play in. A lot of the lads were tired coming off, especially after extra-time."

"We put on a great show for the fans. It was unreal. Obviously the manager and the coaches were trying to shout instructions on, but we couldn't even hear each other."

"It was unreal the amount we had there and the amount of noise they made."

CONGRATULATIONS to Luton Town Football Club,
From all of us at B Dental!

EASTER FUN AT THE DENTIST

Easter Break 6th-17th April

We are working in conjunction with NHS Luton, NHS Bedfordshire and NHS Hertfordshire Primary Care Trusts, to improve the health of your children's teeth!

FREE dental appointments for under 18's plus 18 year olds in full time education.

Did you know that only 50% of the population go to the dentist! Regular check-ups are needed not just to check for healthy teeth and gums but to also check for mouth cancer! We believe prevention is better than cure, so don't leave it too late. Phone today to make an NHS appointment.

Houghton Regis Dental Centre
105-111 High Street, Houghton Regis LU5 5BJ 01582 865001

Hitchin Dental
The rear of 84-85 Bancroft, Hitchin, Herts 01462 438438

Carpenters Arms Dental Practice
118 High Street South, Dunstable LU6 3HJ 01582 472900

Village Dental Practice
632 Hitchin Road, Stopsley LU2 7UG 01582 400282

Luton Dental Centre
First Floor, 10-12 Wellington Street, Luton LU1 2QH 01582 420277

GUESS
THE NAME
OF THE BUNNY
COMPETITION
Easter Bunny
to be won!
Free Goody
Bags

www.bdentalgroup.co.uk

GOALSCORER Tom Craddock said that the Hatters' character was the key to their success, writes Alec Swann.

Mick Harford's men had to come from a goal down and withstand plenty of pressure from Scunthorpe as they held on to secure a 3-2 victory in Sunday's Johnstone's Paint Trophy final victory at Wembley.

Craddock, pictured, set up Chris Martin for the equaliser just after the half hour before getting his name on the scoresheet with a well-placed half-volley in the second half.

And the ex-Middlesbrough man said: "We came back from a goal down and showed good character. They put a lot of pressure on us, but we managed to defend well and also be quite dangerous on the break."

It was a counter-attack that



enabled Craddock to put Luton ahead against the run of play in the second half and the striker was appreciative of Town's defensive effort.

He said: "In the second half Scunthorpe had a lot of the ball, but we managed to keep them out with some excellent defending and, obviously, scored the goals. We've got some very good

defenders like Pilks, Ed, Mickey, Lewis and Dean Brill, but as a team we defended well."

As for his own strike, Craddock recalled: "I remember the cross came in and I thought if I hang off on the edge of the box the ball might drop for me and thankfully it did and I managed to get a good touch on it and get a good connection on it on the half volley."

A visibly-exhausted Craddock made way for Claude Gnackpa late in the game and he admitted that watching from the sidelines didn't do him any favours, saying: "It's more nerve-racking when you're not on the pitch because you take in the atmosphere and you can hear the crowd and I could feel Rossi Jarvis shaking and I've got no fingernails left!"

And on the feeling in the camp, he added: "It's fantastic. Absolutely brilliant to get the win."



Leisurelines fitness suite is a small friendly club that offers an individual service in a warm and welcoming environment.



Memberships start from £16.80 for a daytime membership and £22.50 for an evening membership with no annual contract. Pay as u go is available for £4 a session.



Leisurelines fitness suite, Queensbury School, Langdale Road, Dunstable LU6 3BU
www.leisurelines-fitness.com
01582 884 946

The greatest moment of Keith's career

COMBATIVE midfielder Keith Keane hailed Town's 3-2 Johnstone Paint Trophy final victory against League One Scunthorpe as the greatest moment of his career, writes Mark Wood.

The energetic Irishman put in a tireless shift in Luton's midfield and was evidently delighted after the final whistle.

He said: "It's the best day of my football career so far. I don't really know what else to say. I was lucky to have one of my best games today and things went right for me."

As to the celebrations after the final whistle, he said: "All the lads were that tired they weren't as crazy as you would think."

And he was in no doubt how he would celebrate at Luton Hoo after the game, saying: "To get as drunk as possible! I think we deserve it. We've had a horrible season and it's time to let off a bit of steam."

Keane, 22, was pleased with his own performance and was amazed how far the players were able to push themselves.

He continued: "I think that was hard because myself there wasn't much left in the tank. You are surprised by what your body can do when there is more time left."

"I thought the whole team played well and the fact I know I played well myself is all I need to know."

"Centre midfield, that's one of the best games I've had."

"It's a reward for the players and the fans. The fans have backed us all season. We have had some bad days, but as a team, the majority of the time we have played well."

"I think it's deserved."

And Keane was sure his manager was regretting his promise to shave his head if the Hatters won.

He added: "I think he just wanted to win that badly that he thought it would make us believe even better and I think he is regretting it now."

'We recovered well from that sucker punch'

GEORGE Pilkington praised the determination of the Hatters as they recovered from the shock of Scunthorpe's late equaliser, writes Alec Swann.

Grant McCann's sublime left-footed strike two minutes from time looked to have seized the initiative for the Iron, but Claude Gnaka ensured that the Johnstone's Paint Trophy would be returning to Kenilworth Road.

The defender admitted: "Conceding with a couple of minutes to go was a bit of a sucker punch, but I thought we picked ourselves up excellently and I thought we deserved the win overall."

"We were up against two good forwards, but we were pretty solid across the back four. When we scored the third goal we knew that we would have to do some more defending, but we managed to hold out."

And Pilkington pointed to the Hatters' good form in the build-up to the final, saying: "We've been playing well recently. The first 10 or 15 minutes were a bit shaky, but once we settled in we finished the first half strongly."

Pilkington himself had a consistent game - "I thought I was pretty solid, nothing too flash" - and admitted that, on a warm afternoon, the 120 minutes was tough going, saying: "We had a few players who have only just come back from injury, so we're still just a bit short of fitness and it was hard work."

As for the result, he added: "It was unbelievable, the way the game went. It was all about the result on the day."

"I'm just pleased for everyone concerned. The fans were amazing."

"It's just a great day for Luton Town Football Club and nothing more than that."



CAPTAIN'S EXAMPLE: Midfielder Kevin Nicholls says it was a 'massive win'

'This is why I came back'

LIFTING the Johnstone's Paint trophy was the kind of reason why Kevin Nicholls returned to Kenilworth Road, writes Alec Swann.

Despite his affiliation with the club, there was no shortage of surprise surrounding the midfielder's return last summer, and Sunday's Wembley win made it all worthwhile.

In the aftermath of the victory, Nicholls said: "It's about the club and that's why I came back. It's a very proud moment for myself."

"It was massive for me and my team-mates, it was massive for the manager and it was massive for the fans."

Nicholls produced a typically wholehearted performance in the centre of the Hatters' midfield, earning himself the man-of-the-match honour in the process, and admitted that, given all the circumstances that have surrounded the club's season, lifting the trophy was near the top of his career highlights.

He added: "It's up there. Getting promoted to the Championship was big, but considering what we've had to go through this year, this was a great moment for us."

Nicholls has personified the Hatters' battle during the cam-

Proud skipper speaks of his love for Luton

paign, but the skipper had a special mention for the man in charge, manager Mick Harford.

Speaking about seeing the Luton legend lifting the trophy, Nicholls added: "It was quite an emotional moment. He [Harford] is a special person to me and the club's special."

>> FIRST team coach Alan Neilson was delighted with Town's win at England's national stadium on Sunday.

He said: "It was absolutely fantastic."

And he made reference to the whole occasion, saying: "Before the game even started, from when we got our suits to walking out on the pitch, the hairs were standing up on the back of your neck."

The encounter - "a fantastic game" in Neilson's words - was a great advert for, not only the Johnstone's Paint Trophy, but for cup football itself and will rightly be remembered for the quality of the goals.

And that is something that

Neilson recognised, saying: "From a coaching point of view, I thought the first goal we were perhaps a little deep, but all the other goals were great goals."

"The goals we scored just showed what sort of football we can play as a team."

Without the pressure of having to try to accumulate league points, the Hatters were able to adopt a different approach, a tactic that ultimately paid dividends.

Neilson added: "Normally in the league we have to attack teams straight away, but today we sat back a bit."

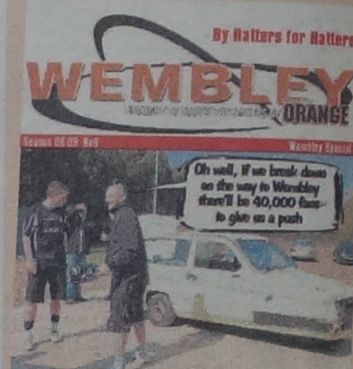
"The first 15 minutes they were sharp and were the better side for the first half hour. Our goals were against the run of play a bit, but once we were in front it looked like being our day until their lad scored the equaliser."

"I thought: 'Here we go', but we battled back."

And Neilson said that, whatever happens during the rest of the season, no-one will be able to doubt the fighting spirit of the Hatters players that was on show at Wembley.

He added: "It was a great win, but there are six games left this season and we'll keep on battling away."

We've still got copies of our commemorative fanzine available



A SPECIAL Wembley edition of our fanzine Half-time Orange was handed out to Hatters fans ahead of Luton Town's Johnstone's Paint Trophy final against Scunthorpe United on Sunday.

Packed with one-off features, news and views, it's a must-have element of Town's big Wembley adventure.

As well as being given out at the national stadium, copies were also distributed at many local pubs and at some of the official Luton Town coach pick-up points.

But if you missed your copy, don't worry. You simply need to visit our Upper George Street reception and pick one up in person.

There's also an online version viewable on the Half-time Orange segment of our website www.lutontoday.co.uk.

Celebrate Hatters' success and buy a fantastic souvenir from our website



WHAT a magic match. Luton's victory over Scunthorpe is a game that'll live long in the memory of Luton Town fans.

And could there be a better way to commemorate Hatters' Wembley success in the Johnstone's Paint Trophy final than purchasing a great memento from our website?

Whether you want to order a standard photograph or poster, or even use one of our great images (like the one above) for a superb gift like a mouse mat, mug, set of coasters or T-shirt, all the options can be found online.

Simply log on to www.lutontoday.co.uk and click on the Image Shop link and look for our special Wembley gallery.



SEE LUTONTODAY.CO.UK FOR MORE REACTION, PLUS OUR GREAT WEMBLEY SLIDESHOW AND VIDEOS... THERE'LL ALSO BE MORE CUP FINAL COVERAGE IN THURSDAY'S EDITION OF THE **Herald & Post**