

LUTON OFF THE BOTTOM

LUTON grudgingly gave away a precious point to relegation rivals **Chelsea** this afternoon — just eight minutes from the whistle that would have given them four wins in a row.

After 90 thrilling minutes in front of packed Kenilworth Road terraces the Hatters had to settle for a draw — after an equaliser in the 82nd minute from Ian Hutchinson.

Luton looked set to take both points after a fine goal from Jimmy Husband — his first of the season — in the 63rd minute. The only consolation for Luton was the news that lowly Leicester lost at Everton.

And one point was enough to take Luton off the bottom.

Luton's biggest crowd of the season piled into Kenilworth Road for the relegation battle. And, as might be expected in such a situation, there was trouble among the fans before the kick-off.

There were a few tussles at the Oak Road end and police ejected several Chelsea supporters.

Some 45 minutes before the kick-off roads round the ground were blocked with traffic and long before the start the huge car park was closed.

Before the match manager Harry Haslam went on to the pitch to receive Bell's Manager of the Month award. Harry clowned, with director Eric Morecambe to get some laughs from the packed stands.

The Hatters were unchanged and were looking for their fourth successive league

victory. They lost in the Cup against Birmingham last week, but their previous league victories against Derby, Ipswich and Wolves added up to six invaluable points.

The outcome of today's game was vital — with both sides struggling to get away from the relegation zone. Thousands of Chelsea fans boosted the gate but it was the Luton crowd who made themselves heard first — when they jeered a long back-pass by Wilkins to Phillips.

The first free-kick went to Chelsea when Faulkner pushed Hutchinson in the back. The kick was taken by Kember but it went straight through to Horn.

Luton won the first corner after Aston beat Locke following a fine pass from Faulkner. And it was Faulkner

just beaten by the Chelsea keeper who caught Aston's corner at the second attempt.

Ronnie Futcher got in the first shot after chasing a header from West. But it gave Phillips no trouble.

A fine piece of aggression by John Ryan saw him rob Cooke and race up the right wing. Ron Futcher was only inches away from his cross.

Luton started at a furious pace and more good work by Husband, Aston, Jimmy Ryan and West ended with Ron Futcher caught offside in the goalmouth.

Tricky Cooke escaped a John Ryan tackle and got the ball to Harris but Horn caught the cross easily.

There was more excitement when a good free kick from Paul Futcher won Luton a corner and Jimmy Ryan put the flag kick on to the roof of the Chelsea net.

Seconds later Luton won another corner but Ryan put the ball behind. Cool defensive work by Paul Futcher and John Ryan cleared the danger when Wilkins and Harris attacked.

Then West was hurt clearing from under the nose of Wilkins. But he carried on without the help of the trainer. Luton looked solid in defence and Faulkner consistently beat Hutchinson.

Two good crosses from Aston were cleared by the Chelsea defence at the expense of an injury to Dempsey. Garland broke quickly through the middle for the Londoners but Paul Futcher pushed a risky pass back to Horn.

An announcement that Leicester were losing at Everton brought chants of "We're staying up" from the Oak Road choir.

A midfield pass from Anderson to Paul Futcher produced a good centre which Phillips did well to catch.

And after starting another move himself Anderson rounded it off by winning a corner. In the 31st minute

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON: Horn, John Ryan, Buckley, Anderson, Faulkner, Paul Futcher, Jim Ryan, Husband, Ronnie Futcher, West, Aston. Sub: Alston.

CHELSEA: Phillips, Locke, Harris, Hollins, Dempsey, Hay, Kember, Wilkins, Garland, Hutchinson, Cooke. Sub: Houseman.

Ref: Mr John Hunting (Leicester).

Husband 63

Hutchinson 82

Attendance: 23,096



Ron Futcher (left) on the attack against Chelsea

from Garland round for a corner.

Another free-kick by Hollins caused the Luton defence some problems but John Ryan, having a splendid match, sorted things out with a rugged clearance.

Further pressure from the Luton forwards, who always had plenty of help from John Ryan, kept the Town's followers hopes alive. Luton always looked the better side and more likely to score.

In the 63rd minute Luton's efforts were rewarded when Husband scored a fine goal — his first of the season — to put the Town ahead.

Then, with only eight minutes left, a corner by Cooke was beaten over the goalline by Hutchinson for the equaliser.

VERDICT

LUTON'S revival continued with a splendid performance at Kenilworth Road this afternoon.

For most of the 90 minutes they ran Chelsea ragged but it didn't look as if they would ever get the ball in the net. What a match Jimmy Husband chose to score his first goal of the season.

The goal came from a rare Chelsea corner, taken by Cooke and the ball was fought over the line by Hutchinson with Luton fighting like mad to keep it out.

Luton played some marvellous flowing football with Aston outstanding in attack and with man of the match John Ryan always able to help out the forwards.

The excitement in the last 20 minutes was almost unbearable as Luton fought to increase their lead, and then Chelsea equalised to make it even worse.

Both Futchers had fine games for Luton and West was outstanding in midfield.

In the Luton defence Faulkner did a marvellous job to contain Hutchinson but he did not prevent the ball crossing the line in that hectic incident which brought the equaliser.

Houseman went on as the Chelsea substitute for Dempsey. Then Hollins was hurt but he had to carry on.

After a slow build-up Wilkins got in a shot for Chelsea which Horn caught easily.

Good defensive work by Paul Futcher sent brother Ron racing away on the left, but his long range shot was well over the target.

Horn's goal was exposed when Garland put a header across the six yard line but Hutchinson was unable to get his head to it and, to the relief of the Luton keeper, the ball went out of play.

Chelsea were hitting back and a shot from Hollins skimmed the post.

John Ryan was injured in a collision with Harris. He carried on without treatment — although he looked shaken.

Aston moved quickly to get in front of keeper Phillips but he could not get in the pass that mattered to Ron Futcher. However the ball went back across the edge of the penalty box giving Anderson all the time in the world to shoot. And he put it over the top.

In the 40th minute Luton were again unlucky when the best effort of the match was headed just wide by the diving Aston after a splendid chip by Ron Futcher.

After some tremendous football by Cooke Luton's Aston and Buckley managed to get the ball into touch. And the Luton defence dealt capably with Hutchinson's feared long throw.

Just before half-time a terrific shot by West was parried by Phillips and a brave diving header from Husband saw the ball drift inches wide of the right hand post.

Luton fully deserved to be ahead at half-time.

Jimmy Ryan put the ball into the Chelsea net following a shot from Ron Futcher but he was ruled offside.

HT: 0-0

At the start of the second half Aston misjudged the speed of a through ball from Buckley and it went out of play before he could centre from a good position.

There was still plenty of drive in Luton's make-up but Ron Futcher might have done better than shoot over the top when he got a good break just outside the box.

And when Chelsea threatened to break Buckley got in a splendidly timed tackle on Garland and pushed the ball back.

And a minute later the Luton keeper dived smartly to his left to turn a hard shot