

'Joke' decision puts Luton on rack at Cardiff

HATTERS FEEL THE

RELEGATION PINCH



Findlay is stranded as Moore (right) runs in to score Cardiff's controversial first goal.



There is no Luton challenge as Stevens jumps to head the winning goal five minutes from time.

Town face three game survival fight

By ERIC HARRIS

LUTON face a possible 270 minutes hard labour in their last three matches in a desperate attempt to beat the fatal drop into the Third Division.

Last night's 2-1 defeat at Cardiff lifted the Welshmen clear of the relegation zone but increased the pressure on Luton, who now face two away games and one at home — and their fate could still hinge on the last game of the season at Wrexham on May 7.

With Blackburn doomed to go down following their 3-1 home defeat by Newcastle last night, Sunderland provided Luton with another crumb of comfort by thrashing Sheffield United 6-2 at Roker Park to take over the leadership of the Second Division.

Luton still need a computer to work out the mathematical possibilities of reaching safety but Charlton's visit to Sheffield on Saturday could not have come at a better time.

Town manager David Pleat, bitterly disappointed with last night's result, still maintains his team need four points to retain their Second Division status.

At the risk of developing Luton's survival battle into a boring saga of inept refereeing, it must be placed on record that last night's official appeared to make a terrible mistake in allowing Cardiff's first goal.

Trick

It came after 11 minutes when Mal Donaghy won a free kick, and Kirk Stephens slipped the ball back to Ricky Hill from near the halfway line.

Hill's short back pass to Donaghy was suicidal and Ronnie Moore quickly pounced onto the error but clearly impeded Donaghy from behind. Referee Eric Read allowed the Cardiff striker to run and round Jake Findlay before slipping the ball into the net despite a desperate late attempt by Paul Price to knock it off the line.

"That decision was a joke," said Pleat. "Donaghy was obviously tripped when facing his own goal, but there is no point in complaining about it now.

"I don't like talking about us being in a critical position but there is no question that we are now fighting for our Second Division future. It all depends on the mental attitude of our players."

While luck — and most teams fighting the drop rely on it — was against the Town, Cardiff manager Richie Morgan agreed with Pleat's view of City's first goal.

"Moore does that a lot," he said. "He always seems to get away with it and, in my opinion, it's a good professional trick."

Apart from an own goal

4:10 APRIL MAIDEN FILLES ST
Non-runners: 1, 2, 9, 11
414 00-00 Mounthske (G Green)
413 0000-00 Nell-Rate (T Lyons II)
412 000-00 Popst's Joy (V Lawso)
411 4300-00 Village Swan (C.D.) (J
410 0000-00 Crown (C.S.) (J
501 00-00 Anahaya (S Hadida)
502 00-00 Asphodel (Mrs K Gro)
503 02-00 Calthness (The Queen)
504 000-00 Crown Evidence (D I)
505 3- Crystal Queen (R Cha)
506 2- Fast Water (Ma Gen)
507 0- Feeling (BF) (A Oslo)
508 0- Fiddle-Fiddle (Lord F)
509 0- Get Ahead (L Fredd)
510 0- Granite (S O Byrne)
511 0- Heavenly Chorus (Mr)
512 0-2 Little Annie (M White)
513 2- Love Song (DEN) (L)
514 0000-00 Little Annie (M White)
515 0- Midsommer Girl (J R)
516 0- Mordice (Ma) M Wyal
517 00-00 Philfree (Sir H Moor)
518 00-00 Shekitt (Mrs G Rober)

Bottom seven

Wrexham	34	11	11	12	38	32	33
LUTON	39	12	9	18	56	53	33
Charlton	40	10	13	17	57	67	33
Oldham	38	10	13	15	42	57	33
Sheff Utd	38	10	11	17	48	64	31
Millwall	35	9	8	18	36	49	26
Blackburn	38	7	10	21	36	69	24

As the keeper came out to narrow the angle, Hatton shot straight but won only a corner with Luton players free in the six yard box. Then, in the second half, Rod Thomas slipped on the ball and allowed the Luton striker to run on. With Alan West free, Hatton shot over the bar.

But Hatton also had bad luck. He shot inches wide after 15 minutes and, ten minutes before the break, a fine move involving Alan Birchenall and Stephens found Hatton crowded out by defenders and Thomas was grateful for the opportunity to make a belated back-pass to Ron Healey.

West and Ricky Hill also went dangerously close before the Town equalised eight minutes from the end — although it took an own goal to do it.

West floated over a fine cross and, as Healey came out the ball was deflected past him by Dave Roberts.

Pleat had resisted the temptation to send on substitute David Moss as the Town were prepared to play out time for a point. But, five minutes from the end, Luton were sent on a miserable ride home when Gary Stevens rose majestically to head in a free effort from substitute Steve Grapes' cross.

CARDIFF: Healey; Jones, Sullivan, Campbell (Grapes), Roberts, Thomas, Bishop, Evans, Moore, Stevens, Buchanan.

LUTON: Findlay; Stephens, Aizlewood, Donaghy, Phillipson-Masters, Price, Hill, West, Taylor, Hatton, Birchenall. Sub: Moss.

REFEREE: E. Read (Bristol)

ATTENDANCE: 10,509.

GOALS: Moore (11), Stevens (85), Roberts (o.g. 82).