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Caught in heavy traffic

LUTON emerged from 90 minutes of controversy and confusion to reach the third round of the Milk Cup at Charlton last night, writes Eric Harris.

The Town lost 2-0 in the second leg at The Valley but go through thanks to a 3-0 win at Kenilworth Road.

They had to survive a terrific barrage throughout the game and had keeper Jake Findlay sent off in the second half for handball.

A goal from former Luton striker Derek Hales after only two minutes and a second from a dubious penalty threatened to earn gritty Charlton extra

time at the very least.

But the handicap of being reduced to ten men for the last 29 minutes served only to inject some urgency into lethargic Luton, who successfully weathered the Charlton storm.

The evening got off to a bad start when the Town's team coach was caught in heavy London traffic, delaying their arrival at the ground until only 30 minutes before the kick off.

There was also heavy traffic into the Luton box and they knew they were in for a battle when Hales cleverly converted Paul Curtis's cross within 120 seconds of the kick off.

Hales threatened to run riot and Findlay made fine saves from a series of shots and headers before Luton put their first effort on target after 33 minutes when Nicky Johns tipped over Paul Walsh's delicate chip.

The bombardment continued at the start of the second half and Mal Donaghy managed to divert Steve White's shot

before the Town were the victims of a cruel refereeing decision in the 49th minute.

Donaghy moved in to challenge Carl Harris for possession and the Welsh international appeared to stub his toe as he tumbled over. The referee, however, awarded a penalty to give Hales his second goal.

MATCH DETAILS

CHARLTON: Johns; Curtis, Walker (Ferns), Robinson, Elliott, Berry, Harris, Bullivant, White, Hales, O'Sullivan.

LUTON: Findlay; Thomas, Money, Horton, Goodyear, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Walsh, Turner, Moss. Substitute: Kellock.

REFEREE: L. Shapter (Torquay). **ATTENDANCE:** 5,973. **GOALS:** Hales two (two and 49 pen). **BOOKINGS:** Ferns (foul on Stein), Elliott (foul on Stein).

Two minutes later, Findlay was sent off for leaping to catch the ball well outside his area as Hales and White threatened to score the equaliser.

Donaghy took over as emergency keeper and knew little about how he managed to fist a White volley away before making another save.

Brian Stein made a token attack at the other end, winning a corner when the ball slipped through Johns's fingers.

But Hales brought fresh hope for Charlton fans in the last ten seconds when he bundled the ball over the line.

It was disallowed for offside.



JAKE FINDLAY

MAL DONAGHY