

Safe and sound!

HATTERS killed off any lingering fears of relegation against QPR — and avoided any last-minute injury scares before Sunday's Wembley date.

With Mal Donaghy struggling to make the Littlewoods Cup Final, it was crucial for Luton to come through Tuesday night's game unscathed — and grab the

LUTON 2 QPR 1 By MICHAEL WEINSTEIN

points.

And inspired by a terrific performance from fit-again David Preece, this they duly did, with a slight dead-leg to Rob Johnson the only problem.

But they had to survive a late penalty claim when 'keeper Andy Dibble collided with Rangers' Alan McDonald.

Whistle happy referee Keith Miller had already awarded two disputed spot-kicks — but luckily for Hatters, this time he was unimpressed.

"It could have been a penalty and I was relieved to see the ref not give it," said chief Ray Harford.

And Rangers' boss Jim Smith said: "The penalty decisions were very bad. We could not have expected another one after our first."

Hatters opened the scoring in the 17th minute when Danny Wilson coolly slotted home the first penalty.

Back in senior-team action for the first time in seven months, David Preece threaded the perfect through-ball to Rob Johnson and his cross was handled by McDonald.

Mick Harford joined Rangers' Martin Allen in the referee's book after



● Mick Harford is booked by the ref.

33 minutes.

And Mark Falco wasted the R's best first-half chance four minutes from the interval, when he beat Marvin Johnson to a high bounce and blasted over.

Rangers' David Kerslake pulled the scores level from the penalty spot 15 minutes after the interval, when from his long throw in, Hatters were penalised for pushing.

But just one minute later and Hatters were back in the driving seat — thanks to captain Steve Foster.

The centre-half rose

magnificently to meet Wilson's free kick and powered his header home.

Hatters' moment of worry came in the 72nd minute when Allen beat the offside trap and sent the ball round Dibble before crashing to the plastic.

"He should have scored anyway," said Smith.

And Dibble — playing his first home game of the season — had Hatters' hearts thumping seven minutes from time when he dropped a high ball and was forced to scramble on all fours to shepherd the ball out.

Although Brian Stein should have put the result beyond doubt a minute earlier when he fired over with just Seaman to beat.

"We needed to win to get ourselves a decent league position," said Harford.

"There was always the fear of being sucked into relegation. It was important for us to get 45 points."