

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST!

**What
a way
to lose**

A CHILLING sense of déjà vu must have hit Luton's management team after 44 minutes of non-stop action at The Dell.

They'd seen it all before — an innocuous tackle, extended treatment from physio Dave Galley . . . and another centre-back on the sick list with an ankle problem.

First there was Darron McDonough — he was the exception — sidelined until the new year with a dislocated shoulder.

Then Graham Rodger and David Beaumont fell victim to the Kenilworth Road ankle injury hoodoo.

And on Saturday shocked Ray Harford and Terry Mancini saw central defender number four bite the dust — when Marvin Johnson went down just before the interval having aggravated an ankle knock picked up in training.

Ironically, Harford and Mancini were centre-backs in their heyday.

And after seeing fifth choice Julian James make it to the end of the game unscathed, boss Harford joked: "We are running out of centre-backs — it was either Julian or me for the subs bench!"

Harford knew even his first-choice defence would have their work

SOUTHAMPTON 6 LUTON 3 By MICHAEL WEINSTEIN



• Marvin Johnson

cut out keeping a rampant Southampton front four at bay.

Johnson's ankle was weak and partner John Dreyer had a thigh strain — so the manager gambled on attack being the best form of defence — and Hatters more than held their own in the first period. Things looked omin-

ous when an unmarked but suspiciously offside looking Paul Rideout fired Southampton into a second-minute lead.

But Luton — who'd been unfortunate to lose by two goals to Manchester United last week — refused to lie down.

An equaliser looked certain after 10 minutes when David Preece's free kick was cleared to Kingsley Black. Keeper Tim Flowers parried the youngster's vicious drive straight into the path of Lars Elstrup but the Dane's half shot ran right across the face of goal and Preece was unable to tuck it away.

Hatters drew level after 25 minutes with a goal out of nothing from Dreyer. The home side failed to clear Luton's



• It's there — John Dreyer's spectacular volley flies past Tim Flowers.

fourth corner and when the ball drifted out to Dreyer, the defender lashed home a fantastic volley from fully 20 yards.

Southampton wasted a glorious chance ten minutes later when Matthew Le Tissier rounded Alec Chamberlain but failed to get a shot in.

Whistled

Le Tissier made amends four minutes from the break when he headed in Jimmy Case's free-kick to give Southampton a precarious lead.

And precarious it

proved, for Hatters were level within two minutes of the re-start when Elstrup squared for Black and his shot took a slight deflection as it whistled past Flowers.

Hatters were still in with a shout after nippy Rod Wallace put Southampton back in front with a goal from close range after 53 minutes.

But the game went out of their reach after Harford sent on Roy Wegerle to make it a three-man attack.

Wegerle didn't get a touch as Southampton netted twice in little over a minute through

a cracker from Wallace and Alan Shearer's close-range effort.

And when Rideout got his second and Southampton's sixth with a bullet header from Case's 85th minute free kick, Hatters were

in danger of being embarrassed.

But Elstrup reduced the deficit again 60 seconds later when he turned like lightning in the box and lashed home his seventh goal for the club.

THE LINE-UP

SOUTHAMPTON: Flowers, Dodd, Benali, Case, Ruddock, Osman, Le Tissier, Cockerill, Shearer, Rideout, Wallace. Subs: Moore and Ray Wallace.

LUTON: Chamberlain, Breacker, Harvey, Wilson, Johnson (James 45), Dreyer, Preece (Wegerle 71), Elstrup, Dowie, Kennedy, Black.

• Attendance: 14,014.

Shell-shocked boss Ray Harford still found time to smile after watching his depleted troops net three times away from home — and still leave empty handed.

Hatters haven't scored three times in an away league match since September 1987, when they beat Oxford 5-2.

And Harford said: "There aren't many times you score three goals away and get beat-

en. "I'm despondent, but there are mitigating circumstances. We looked good going forward, but we're missing a centre-half with presence.

"There's no doom and gloom feeling. I remember feeling a lot worse after we lost 1-0 at Charlton a couple of seasons ago.

"Here we got beaten 6-3 but it was never a tanking — it was only the last 20 minutes that we got mullered."

Harford was particularly scathing about keeper Alec Chamberlain, saying: "It looked like he had a poor day.

"The third and fourth goals were his fault."

Play it

