

REF HEDGES HITS HATTERS' HOPES

Stringer
'It was
a pen'

Norwich boss Dave Stringer refused to be drawn into the big penalty debate.

The manager — delighted at his team's first home win since January — would only say: "I think it was penalty — because the referee gave it."

Stringer had words of encouragement for Luton, saying: "They showed a lot of fighting spirit against us and if they can keep that going they've got every chance of surviving."

REFEREE Dennis Hedges set Hatters on the way to a damaging defeat at Carrow Road.

Hedges' astonishing first-half penalty decision stopped Jimmy Ryan's men in their tracks.

Both sets of fans looked on in amazement as the Headington referee pointed to the spot after Alec Chamberlain had cleared at the feet of Henrik Mortensen.

Luton — desperate for at least a point in the struggle against relegation — failed to recover from the devastating 26th-minute hammer blow.

Their play had begun to threaten before the penalty but then their inexperienced front line didn't test Norwich keeper Bryan Gunn.

Boss Ryan admitted: "I think the game hinged on the decision."

"I don't want to criticise the referee. There was no contact between the players."

"The goalkeeper touched the ball and the player throws himself for the penalty — I suppose he's got to do that — it's just surprising that the referee awarded it."

"I think even their

NORWICH 2 LUTON 0
By MICHAEL WEINSTEIN

NORWICH: Gunn, Culverhouse, Bowen, Tanner, Linighan, Townsend, Sherwood, Mortensen (Fox), Rosario (Coney), Crook, Phillips.

LUTON: Chamberlain, Breacker, McDonough, Kennedy, James, Dreyer, Wilson, Nogan (Rees), Dowie, Preece, Black.

Other sub: Harvey.

• Attendance: 14,451.

players were a little embarrassed about it.

"You're tearing your hair out in the dugout but there's nothing you can do about it."

"I felt we were just starting to get in the game then."

"But it seemed to knock the stuffing out of us more than it should have — that's the worst part about it."

"The bottom line is that we went on to play rather poorly after that."

"You couldn't fault our effort but it was just misdirected."

Luton were first to threaten when Kurt Nogan latched on to an Iain Dowie flick but Andy Linighan raced back to clear the danger.

Darron McDonough



• My ball — Iain Dowie stretches for all he's worth.

— playing his first game since twice dislocating his shoulder in October — got in a mess with John Dreyer after seven minutes. Mortensen bore down on goal and when Chamberlain diverted his shot into the path of Tim Sherwood the midfielder contrived to hit the post with the goal gaping.

Sherwood's through ball following a sweeping Norwich move set Mortensen away for the incident that brought the penalty.

Hedges ordered Norwich skipper Andy Townsend to retake his first spot kick after encroachment by a home player — and his second effort was equally impressive.

Tim Breacker was booked for dissent though Hedges refused to resort to similar action as the tackles flew in hard and fast until half time.

Norwich killed off the game with a superb second goal just three minutes after the break.

Danny Wilson was caught in possession by Robert Rosario and the striker laid the ball back for Mark Bowen to curl a brilliant effort beyond Chamberlain's despairing left hand.

Norwich were unlucky when David Phillips' thundering drive struck Rosario — though Hedges deemed that worthy of a corner.

Dowie and Nogan were just wide of the mark with headers from a string of Kingsley Black crosses.

The impressive Rosario staggered out of the action after Dowie caught him below the belt.

But the home side should have notched a third when Mortensen stormed through only to fire into the side netting when a pass would have been more productive.

Luton showed their fighting spirit in the last quarter but Black's persistent crosses never looked like being converted.



• Chasing hard — Kingsley Black (left) in action.