



START OF THE FIGHTBACK . . . Lee Philpott turns in Devon White's cross to start United's amazing comeback last night.

Picture: Cyrus Daboo.

Fans spark a great escape

92/93

► MATCH FACTS

CAMBRIDGE UNITED 3
LUTON TOWN 3

22 mins, 0-1: A pin-point low cross from over-lapping full-back Marvin Johnson, and SCOTT OAKES steered a shot inside the far post from 12 yards.

48 mins, 0-2: Jonathan Sheffield had PHIL GRAY'S 20-yarder covered until the ball took a huge deflection off Mick Heathcote's leg and left the keeper stranded.

54 mins, 0-3: GRAY rubbed it in by robbing Heathcote 25 yards out, heading for goal, and finishing with a low drive inside the right-hand post for his fifth goal in three games.

73 mins, 1-3: Role reversal as striker Devon White crossed from the right flank and winger LEE PHILPOTT stabbed a close range shot under the keeper.

77 mins, 2-3: A flick through by Mick Norbury set up a race for the ball between goalkeeper Andy Petterson and United substitute JOHN FRANCIS.

Petterson had half a yard advantage, but Francis flashed through, got the first touch, was rewarded with a kind rebound off the keeper, and finished well from a difficult angle.

87 mins, 3-3: White and Norbury again the creators. This time it was a centre from the left flank by White, headed across the box by his fellow striker for FRANCIS to finish with a ferocious volley from 12 yards.

Cambridge United: Sheffield, Fensome, O'Shea, Heathcote, Kimble, Philpott, Clayton (Ainsworth 59 mins), Raynor, Rowett (Francis 55 mins), White, Norbury.

Luton Town: Petterson, Linton, James, Salton, Johnson, Peake, Claridge, Kamara, Preece, Gray, Oakes. Subs not used: Campbell, Greene.

No bookings.

Attendance: 5,716.

Referee: V Callow (Solihull).

By RANDALL BUTT

David Preece and classy Chris Kamara.

More goals in the game looked very likely, but not for United.

Johnson's men started promisingly, but from the 15th minute for almost an hour, they were second best as the Hatters played a smoother and sharper passing game than the Hammers on Saturday.

Claridge and Des Linton might have added to the agony, whereas a Gary Clayton 30-yarder, and Mick Norbury's header blocked on the line, were the only threats to the visitors' goal.

When Lee Philpott squeezed a shot under the keeper in the 73rd minute it seemed nothing more than a consolation goal.

But four minutes later Francis grabbed a second, and the doubts crowded in for a Luton side who surrendered a two-goals lead at the weekend.

"We tired badly at the end," said Luton's experienced boss David Pleat.

It was his team's third match in 10 days. United's fourth in nine.

Winning adds wings to weary legs, losing is supposed to add lead weights.

Somehow United overcame all that to stage one of the greatest comebacks seen at the Abbey Stadium.

IT was a massive understatement from skipper Danny O'Shea: "We showed a bit of character tonight."

With only 17 minutes to go Cambridge United were surely down and out, trailing 3-0 at home to Luton Town.

Caretaker boss Gary Johnson's grip on the job had loosened, the directors' thoughts straying inevitably from the game to their choice of candidates for the managerial short list.

But the Abbey Stadium fans, often criticised by past regimes for their quietness at crucial times, had not given up. Their support lifted a tired team and the reward was remarkable.

Fourteen marvellous minutes later it was 3-3 after John Francis got off the bench to hit two goals in 10 minutes, and the Hatters were hanging on for a point.

"At 3-0 down we were just playing for pure pride," admitted O'Shea. "But in the last few minutes we were playing for the win."

"The fans kept us going after Luton got those goals early in the second half, and what happened showed the spirit in the side now."

Luton, looking nothing like a relegation zone team, were 3-0 ahead only nine minutes after the break.

Phil Gray, who hit two goals in six minutes, was razor sharp, ex-United striker Steve Claridge roamed menacingly, while midfield was ruled by hard-working