



Flying high: Albion's Bob Taylor tests Luton with an overhead kick. Picture/DENNIS RUDDLE

Disastrous holiday continues to queer Burkinshaw's pitch

West Bromwich Albion 1 Luton Town 1

By **MARTIN WARRILLOW**

The Birmingham Post

The voice of the unhappy Albion supporter said it all: "Well we got one more point out of those three games than I thought we would get."

He was referring to the holiday threesome of Bristol City, Birmingham City and Luton Town.

And while the St Andrew's defeat was a real Christmas stuffing, Albion should be sorely disappointed to have managed no more than a point from the other two festive fixtures.

In fact they should be kicking themselves into the middle of next year after failing to dismantle a limited Luton side who came for a point, got it, and very nearly sneaked all three.

The key to Albion's failings were the same two that have locked them into the lower end of the table since early September — defensive disasters and a lack of forward fire power.

They have scored one goal in three games since Andy Hunt broke his foot and after 45 minutes of complete domination brought absolutely no re-

ward here, it was no surprise to hear manager Keith Burkinshaw reveal plans to draft in an on-loan striker for the month until Hunt returns.

Quite frankly the 33-year-old legs of Simon Garner are no longer good enough and Bob Taylor can only do so much on his own.

As to defensive disasters the one that cost Albion here ranked up with the best.

After 36 minutes in which Luton's back four were as busy as shop assistants on Christmas Eve, the ball finally found its way to Paul Mardon. Under no pressure at all he dwelt too long and Luton's former Walsall midfielder David Preece nipped in to drive past an astonished Tony Lange.

By then Albion should have been out of sight, the 13th-minute incident when Paul Raven's header was kicked off the line and Taylor's follow-up brilliantly tipped over by 'keeper Jurgen Sommer being the best of a string of chances.

But Mardon's blunder somehow knocked the stuffing out of them and a Luton side that had opened up with Kerry Dixon as the lone striker and a five-man midfield suddenly came out to play.

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With the mood turning ugly and the Albion fans advising the board where to put their planned share issue salvation came in the shape of Micky Mellon.

The Scot's first league goal of the season was a fine one as well as he picked up Stacy Coldicott's through ball, made room, and lashed a right-foot shot under Sommer.

Salvation then, but not enough, and Burkinshaw blamed the ploughed-up pitch as much as anything.

"We tried to play football but it is hard on that pitch and it was an uphill struggle once they scored," he admitted.

Indeed, and unless he sorts out Albion's twin troubles quickly Burkinshaw could find the rest of the season an uphill struggle.

MATCH FACTS

- **Scorers:** Preece (36) 0-1; Mellon (69) 1-1.
- **ALBION** (4-4-2): Lange, Burgess, Mardon, Raven, Lilwall; Ashcroft (Fereday, 59), Mellon, Hamilton, Coldicott; Taylor, Garner. Subs (unused): Hunter Naylor.
- **LUTON** (4-5-1): Sommer, Linton, Peake, Drayer, Thomas; Houghton (Dickov, 60), Teller, Harper, Preece, Hughes (James, 83); Dixon. Sub (unused): Patterson.
- **Bookings:** Albion - Ashcroft, Mardon (fouls); Luton - Linton, Thomas (dissent).
- **Referee:** Mr K Breen (Liverpool).
- **Attendance:** 16,138.
- **Albion Man of the Match:** Paul Raven - shored up Albion's defence.