

Hatters goal-less yet again

By PETER KENYON

Barnsley 1 Luton 0

BARNESLEY super-sub Andy Rammell made the afternoon's single decisive pass to freeze out Hatters at bitterly cold Oakwell.

Once again it was the same sorry story for relegation threatened Hatters - resolute in defence but hapless in attack.

Rarely can the popular chant "You couldn't score in a brothel" be such an accurate description of a football team.

Twelve strikes in 19 League matches makes Hatters far-and-away the League's most goal shy outfit.

By my reckoning, at £15 a match ticket, frustrated Hatters fans have paid £24 for each goal this season.

With Christmas coming, a nice shirt from Debenhams might be better value.

But you've got to feel for goalkeeper Ian Feuer, a prospective £500,000 buy from West Ham, and the defence in front of him.

They are battening down the hatches more often than not - while the attack and midfield consistently let them down.

Defenders might win championships - but strikers will save you from relegation.

It started well enough and for 45 minutes it was end to end stuff with Hatters having their share of the play.

But by the end of the 90 minutes it was the familiar cry of "Westley out", and Feuer vented his obvious

frustration at the outcome by throwing his water bottle high into the air as he trudged off.

It took Luton just three minutes to create the game's first opening. Richard Harvey whipped in a low cross and the unlikely figure of Scott Oakes got in with a header which went just wide.

Barnsley's response was immediate, but Andy Payton shot weakly from close range after being put clear on the left of the box by Andy Liddell.

Martin Bullock smashed a shot just wide after good work from the lively Liddell, and then it was straight back up the other end for a spot of penalty drama.

Darren Patterson skied a hopeful cross into Barnsley's box, and as Vidar Riseth and Barnsley's Steve Davis tussled for the ball, Davis seemed to slip and tug Riseth down with him in a last desperate effort to avert the danger.

Everyone stopped for the referee to point at the spot, but when he didn't the ball rolled across to a vainly appealing Dwight Marshall whose surprise at having play waved on was all too clear by the fact he hit a shot against the outside of a post while only five yards out and unmarked.

Oakes then found himself in the referee's book for time wasting at a throw-in, one of several bizarre decisions by the man in black.

Barnsley's Owen Archdeacon followed Oakes into the book two minutes later - and from the free kick Hatters were nearly gifted the elusive opener.

Peter Shirtliff and Davis both waited for each other to clear a stationary ball inside the Barnsley box, but as Riseth wound up for a

free shot on goal Davis finally decided it was time to intervene and he hoofed clear.

A minute later it was Barnsley who came within an ace of scoring - but Neil Redfearn's snapshot on the turn from 18 yards was acrobatically tipped over by the alert Feuer.

And two minutes before the break it was Barnsley almost in the lead again - courtesy of an all too familiar Trevor Peake blunder, though to be fair to yesterday's stand-in skipper, who took over the arm band from the injured Steve Davis, the veteran defender played a solid defensive game.

So too did all the back four, who are establishing themselves as one of the meanest defenders in the Division.

With Barnsley's own defence also on a mean streak, and the two strike forces between them having managed just three goals in 540 minutes, the gamblers might have staked a fortune on a goal-less draw.

But midway through the second period just minutes after the arrival of substitute Rammell on the scene, Barnsley struck the decisive goal.

The ball was played to Rammell on the edge of the box with his back to goal and his first time flick fell straight into the path of Redfearn, who had made a telling run from mid-field. He made no mistake in ramming the ball past the hopelessly exposed Feuer as he darted forward to narrow the angle.

Even a triple substitution failed to spark Hatters into any sort of response and by the end the score line could have been even worse.