

Defeat at Birmingham leaves woeful Hatters deeper in the relegation mire



● THAT'S MINE! – The ill-fated Kim Grant battles for possession

It's glum in Brum

BIRMINGHAM CITY 4
LUTON TOWN 0
By PETE KENYON

ONLY a mixture of amazing grace and creative accounting can save Luton now.

Survival might still be possible in theory, but Hatters are definitely on a first division life support machine.

From the moment Paul Devlin fired the Blues into a lightning quick 17-second lead Hatters never looked like getting out of their sickbed.

At 1-0 down with 20 minutes to play there was always going to be hope, however forlorn – but fate dealt another cruel blow in a season which has already dealt Luton a fistful of cruel blows.

In-form new striker Kim Grant was clattered to the floor by ex-Brentford man Martin Grainger and had to be stretchered off - with Lennie Lawrence having already used all his substitutes.

Predictably enough, the 10 men went baggier at the seams than Bagpuss and within five minutes it was 3-0.

And just to rub salt into the wound for the 1,000 or so travelling fans who would soon be filing out of St Andrews in funeral-style

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION TWO (BOTTOM)

	PLD	PTS
18 MILLWALL	43	51
19 TRANMERE ROVERS	41	50
20 READING	41	49
21 PORTSMOUTH	43	48
22 OLDHAM	41	46
23 LUTON TOWN	41	41
24 WATFORD	41	38

procession, Paul Barnes pounced on an Ian Feuer parry to make it four.

Hatters can say Lady Luck walked out on them weeks ago – but the sorry truth is they play the perfect part of a second division side.

A speculative punt over the still sleeping centre-back pairing of stand-in skipper Darren Patterson and Marvin Johnson proved to be the spear which knocked the heart out of Luton.

Pocket rocket midfielder Devlin darted between the two, chested down, coolly rounded Feuer and slotted home.

As Feuer fished the ball out of the net he became the first Hatter to touch the ball in the match.

Paul Peschisolido should have done better after intercepting a woeful Gary Waddock square pass but elected to shoot from distance when he had time and room to take the ball closer.

Ten minutes before the break Waddock limped off after becoming Hatters' first casualty of a sad afternoon – he never recovered from a stern challenge 10 minutes into the game.

Richard Harvey came on and it was he who might have clawed Hatters back into this match in spectacular style but for a stunning save from Bart Griemink.

With just seven minutes in the second half played and Hatters buzzing round the Birmingham box Scott Oakes won a free kick right on the edge of the dee.

Harvey stepped up and scooped a perfect left-foot curling effort towards the top-right corner but somehow Griemink materialised from nowhere like a case of 'Beam me down, Scotty'. After that Luton lost heart and Birmingham surged forward in numbers.

On the hour Birmingham substitute Andy Legg charged towards the byline, squared the ball past Feuer into the path of Barnes, but Johnson did superbly well to nudge the striker off his stride as he prepared to toe-poke into the empty net from three yards.

Tomlinson came on for Oldfield and Guentchev made way for Taylor but nothing changed.

With 20 minutes to play Grant was stretchered off - and simultaneously Birmingham boss Barry Fry threw powerhouse striker Kevin Francis into the fray in place of the bloody-nosed John Cornforth.

Five minutes later Francis robbed Patterson on the edge of the box but shot wide when he had only Feuer to beat. Seconds later he made up for the miss – heading home right-back Gary Poole's perfect floated centre from point-blank range.

Scarcely had Hatters fans debated the irony of the St Andrews PA blaring out Celebrate Good Times it was 3-0. This time Barnes side-footed home after being put clear by Peschisolido.

Two minutes before the end it was Peschisolido again - but this time Feuer parried his efforts and Barnes was on hand to net his second.



● MY BALL! – Griemink tidies up in the Birmingham goal