

Bitter rivals appear doomed as referee goes yellow card crazy

Cain disables dogged derby

Luton 0 Watford 0
By PETE KENYON

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HATTERS' boss Lennie Lawrence has all but given up the first division ghost after a bore draw not helped by an appalling referee.

Graham Alexander saw red in the dying seconds and nine others were booked in a game with scarcely a hint of malice.

A draw probably sealed the fate of both sides and after the match both Lawrence and Watford coach Luther Blissett all but threw in the towel. Said Lawrence: "We've cut each other's throats here today - but as far as we're concerned 36 goals in 42 games says it all.

"That single statistic relegates you - we look like a half decent team without a cutting edge - we both looked like two relegation teams today".

And the man with the Midas touch when it comes to beating the drop isn't exactly diagnosing better times ahead.

"We have to look at whether we can score in any division - the players did what they could but it's not enough". Only Hatters defence got any credit for what has been a miserable season. "Defensively we are in the top eight".

But although Lawrence refused to criticise petty referee George Cain, Blissett was less guarded with his comments.

"The referee didn't help with the decisions he made early on and the players suffered for that in the later stages", he said referring to the four bookings in the first nine minutes.

"There was nothing vicious about that game at all. The passion and do-or-die attitude that you expect in a derby match of such crucial importance wasn't even there" moaned Blissett.

"The supporters were up for it but the players never rose above their normal game which is disappointing bearing in mind it was such a crucial game", he added. It was almost inevitable that someone would be sent off after Mr Cain went on a name-collecting bonanza.

But Hatters full-back Alexander would scarcely have had time to run the hot water following his dismissal - as the final whistle blew just seconds later.

Ten players ended up in the little black book as wholesale meat salesman Mr Cain carved all the entertainment out of the dull passionless derby.

Craig Ramage, David Oldfield, Devon White and Alexander all saw yellow early on - and before 45 minutes were up Andie Hessenthaler, Scott Oakes and Luton skipper Steve Davis had all got into the bad books.

And when Oakes went clattering over the advertising hoardings and into the Watford fans one half-expected Mr Cain to intervene and start brandishing yellow cards at a group of four or five Hornets fans who started hurling abuse at Oakes and waving fingers at him in obscene gestures.

But the man in black sensibly decided to leave this matter to the boys in blue, who dispensed their own yellow cards in the form of a stern verbal warning.



● OAKES - booked

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE DIVISION TWO

BOTTOM POSITIONS

		PLD	PTS
17	GRIMSBY TOWN.....	43	54
18	WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS...	43	53
19	MILLWALL.....	44	51
20	READING.....	43	50
21	PORTSMOUTH.....	44	49
22	OLDHAM ATHLETIC.....	43	49
23	WATFORD.....	43	42
24	LUTON TOWN.....	42	42



● HATTERS' BEST CHANCE - Kim Grant rounds Watford keeper Miller...

But minutes later about five fans were given their marching orders by the police and dragged away from the fray, kicking and screaming much to the amusement of Hatters' fans in the main stand. It was half an hour before the first shot on goal - a Bontcho Guentchev curling free kick which sailed just too high.

Kim Grant might have had a pantomime goal

two minutes later after Watford keeper Kevin Miller stubbed his toe in the dirt as he attempted to hoof a back pass to half way.

The ball rolled to Grant 40 yards out but his first time chip went just a foot too high with Miller stranded on the edge of his box.

Alexander forced Miller into the game's only serious save just before the break with a cross come shot from an acute angle which would have crept in but for the Hornet keeper's full-stretch dive.

On 53 minutes Grant wasted one of the game's clear cut chances.

Oakes played a defence splitting ball through the middle but as Grant burst clear and rounded the keeper he made the angle too tight for himself and could only hook the ball into the side netting.

Tony Thorpe sliced a left foot shot well wide with only the keeper to beat just minutes later, and just after the hour Devon White wasted Watford's best chance. Thomas almost gifted the Hornets a goal by passing straight into the path of White, but the Hornet wasted it. Moralee found himself booking victim number eight nine minutes before time, and fellow sub Derek Payne followed minutes later.

But there was still time for Mr Cain to finally get his pound of flesh in injury time when Alexander received his marching orders for first disputing a throw in and then embarking on some push and shove with Payne.



● BULGARIAN WARSHIP - Guentchev gets stuck in to a midfield tussle yesterday



● ...And the xexpression says it all about the end-result