

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

LENNIE LAWRENCE offered a public apology at Ashton Gate after Luton Town's abject surrender on Tuesday left them bottom of the Second Division, the only team without a single point.

Against Bristol City they failed to muster a single worthwhile shot - their only effort on target was a hopeful long-range drive by sub **Graham Alexander** three minutes from time.

Everything else was a shambles, with the defence paper thin, and City, without a point themselves before the game, were made to look like world-beaters.

To compound it all, **Tony Thorpe** got himself sent off for a flash of temper, lashing out at Darren Barnard in retaliation for the Bristol man's foul.

The red card was inevitable, and the only surprise was that the ten men conceded only one more goal in the 38 minutes after Thorpe's dismissal.

The players will not need to be told how poor they were collectively and as a team.

They short-changed their supporters, and we can only hope that the reaction will be a touch of the determination and cohesion so sadly missing being regained for Saturday's visit of Rotherham. If not, it's going to be a long, long and very miserable season.

For much of the game it was difficult to work out what sort of pattern the team was trying to adopt.

Paul Showler made his full debut on the left of midfield, and **Kim Grant** played on the right, with **David Oldfield** the spearhead too often left isolated.

Showler produced a couple of good threatening crosses in the first half, but Grant seemed to be lost in the wide spaces on the Town's right, where most of the action was being played in the other half of the field.

Gary Waddock, **Ceri Hughes** and Thorpe, until his stupid red card blunder, tried to bring some semblance of order to midfield, but the real problem was in the back four.

Greg Goodridge, a £50,000 summer buy from Queen's Park

Rangers, made a dashing home debut, in a team denied five regulars through injury.

He was quick, enthusiastic and incisive, playing as a right winger, and showed an obvious enjoyment for running fast and getting stuck in.

His fire was doused a little after he was booked for an over-keen challenge on **Mitchell Thomas** in the 14th minute, but by then he had helped himself to the first goal, courtesy of a defence that regularly consisted of more holes than players.

They all had a nightmare, and with no platform to build on the attack was short of service and spasmodic at best.

Like the Town, City went into the game looking for their first point of the season, after home and away defeats, and Joe Jordan's management career was rumoured to be on the line.

After 90 minutes, it must have been Lennie Lawrence thinking about his prospects, after watching the sort of performance that can get managers sacked.

After the dressing room inquest he emerged grim-faced to meet the Press. "The first thing I must say is to apologise to the fans who travelled here to watch that," he said. "What they saw was not acceptable.

"Our defence used to be all right, but here every time the ball went into our box in the air I thought we were going to concede a goal.

"We got to half-time only two down, and we said that if we didn't concede any more we might have a chance. But within a couple of minutes another goal is headed in, completely unchallenged."

You couldn't even feel sympathy for Thorpe - his bad-tempered assault on Barnard deserved the red card it got, and Lawrence will hit him with a club fine.

Basic defending techniques were at fault as City helped themselves to a rare goal feast. A high free kick led to the opener, by Goodridge, after a shot by Shaun Goater was charged down.

That was after 12 minutes, and four minutes before the break Goater and Kevin Nugent waltzed

through the heart of the Town defence with simple accurate passing, and although **Julian James** blocked Goater the ball ran loose and no-one was covering as Nugent accepted the gift.

The half-time team talk did nothing for the Town. I clocked City's fourth goal at 50 seconds after the restart. Again it was basic and simple: Brian Tinnion crossed from the left and the Town men stood around and admired Goater's header, his third goal since being recruited from Rotherham for £175,000.

Within five minutes the Town declined to clear a corner, and although James charged down a shot by Martin Kuhl, Goodridge snapped up the rebound for his second goal of the game.

After Thorpe's departure the

fifth goal was a bit messy. Again it started with a corner, followed by a cross back into the danger area after a half-clearance. Jason Cundy was credited with the final headed touch from Goater's header.

Two brief interludes raised ironic cheers from the Town's bemused fans: sub **Andrew Fotiadis** won the team's one and only corner after 72 minutes, and Alexander produced the lone on-target shot, but without not enough power to worry Keith Welch.

"We played some good football and made it count," said City manager Jordan. But rarely will he meet opposition prepared to stand around and let his team do that, the way the Town did.