

Luton respond to wake-up call

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By Jonathan Noble

Luton Town2 Bristol City 2

IF Luton Town had any illusions that their season run-in would take them to a comfortable automatic Division Two promotion place, they were quickly dispelled against Bristol City at Kenilworth Road last night when they were counting their blessings after escaping with a draw.

It took just two minutes for Luton to realise the uphill battle they would face against the ninth-placed side when Marvin Johnson brought down Paul Agostino in the penalty box.

Shaun Goater, City's leading scorer this season, handed Luton goalkeeper Ian Feuer an easy save as he dived to the left, but the tall American was unable to get hold of the ball and Goater scored his 19th goal of the season from the rebound.

Luton's failure to convert their many chances was heavily punished by a Bristol side eager to secure a first victory for new manager John Ward, who stepped in after Joe Jordan left.

Goater should have given them a two-goal lead when he broke through an unsure defence to shoot just wide after 31 minutes, but more bad news for Luton came after 40, when Agostino

tapped home a swinging cross from Paul Allen.

It would have been a brave man to bet against Bristol at this point and memories of the sides' earlier encounter this season, when City won 5-0 at Ashton Gate during Luton's disappointing start, sprung to mind.

But the visitors' defence finally cracked just seconds before half-time when Steve Davis headed home a Graham Alexander cross from the right. Luton secured the equaliser in the 73rd minute when Tony Thorpe headed in his 27th goal of the season from a Ceri Hughes corner.

"It has been a night of mistakes, but we have managed to salvage something from the mess," said Luton manager Lennie Lawrence. "Defensively I haven't seen anything as bad as that since I've been here, our passing was jittery and we've got to cope better under pressure.

"We now need to win three out of four of our final matches to stand a chance of winning this League."

Luton Town: Feuer; McGowan (McLaren 45), Thomas, Waddock, Davis; Johnson, Hughes, Alexander, Oldfield (Grant 58); Thorpe, Guentchev (Marshall 45)..

Bristol City: Welch; Owers, Brennan, Shail, Paterson; Kuhl, Hewlett, Carey, Agostino (Bent 65); Goater (Nugent 79), Allen. Sub: Seal. Booked: Welch.

Referee: G Singh (Wolverhampton).