

Furious Lawrence slams 'unprofessional' Hatters

● Tony Thorpe – who was denied scoring chances by Walsall



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Report by
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Walsall 3 Luton Town 2
SEETHING Hatters' boss Lennie Lawrence, right, launched a broadside against his players as Luton threw away a 2-1 lead.

The angry manager accused his team of being "unprofessional" – then admitted yesterday's defeat had all but ended Luton's chance of winning the division.

"For the tenth time this season we have taken a lead and failed to win and that is scandalous and unprofessional.

"You just can't do it and expect to win the championship.

"For us to leave Kyle Lightbourne one-on-one against Steve Davis only five minutes after going in front is nothing short of scandalous.

"When the ball went in the net I was absolutely incensed sitting on the bench.

"We have a strict game plan to play to after going in front but the players just don't seem to be able to stick to it.

"Lightbourne played magnificently, but it was us who made him look like a cross between Ferdinand, Shearer and Fowler.

"We did not only surrender, we committed suicide. If we had won today we could have won the league."

It was Walsall netbuster Lightbourne who won the battle of the hot-shots as Tony Thorpe was harnessed by the Saddlers.

The Midlands' lanky striker scored twice and laid on the winner as Hatters hopes of automatic promotion all but vanished in the face of the Bermudan's trio.

A well shackled Thorpe hardly got a look-in and when he did finally get a sniff at goal four



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But what a match as the sides exchanged blows like a pair of heavyweight boxers – real end-to-end stuff.

Trailing 1-0 to Lightbourne's 18th minute header – which Ian Feuer can count himself unlucky to have conceded – Hatters could count themselves lucky not to be dead and buried at half-time.

Feuer again pulled off a breathtaking save from Mark Blake's 25 yard volley to keep Hatters in it, then watched as Luton snatched two goals in as many minutes to turn the game on its head.

On loan Andy Kiwomya curled a superb free kick straight in the corner to level things up on 52 minutes, and two minutes later Steve Davis planted an unstoppable header past Walker from Alexander's pinpoint cross.

The lead lasted just five minutes as Lightbourne outpaced Davis to a long ball down the inside left then hooked a left foot first time effort beyond Feuer's despairing dive as the Luton goalkeeper raced to narrow the angle.

And 14 minutes from time it was Hodge who punished Luton to leave Hatters both looking up the table and over their shoulders as the promotion race reaches burning point.

minutes from time the crossbar was on hand to act as an extra defender.

A rare 76th minute error from Marvyn Johnson – who misjudged a header back to his goalkeeper – enabled the pacy Lightbourne to intercept on the byline, square across the edge of the box, and leave the rest to man-of-the-match John Hodge, who lashed home from 20 yards for what turned out to be the winner.

Hatters rolled down their sleeves to provide a grandstand finish – a finish dismissed by Lawrence as "laughable" – but Tony Thorpe's mis-hit volley hit the bar, substitute Darren Patterson had two scrambled efforts hooked off the line and Steve Davis' thunderous drive went straight at goalkeeper James Walker.