

Sad Hatters' tale of woe

Fulham 0 Luton 0

YOU could tell it was not going to be Luton's day when manager Lennie Lawrence had problems getting into the car park.

On the pitch the Hatters had most of the possession but could not break down Fulham's Fort Knox-like defence which has let in only one goal in three games this season.

Lawrence already had last season's top goal scorer Tony Thorpe out with a hamstring injury which he picked up against Southend on Monday.

Ian Feuer and Andrew Fotiadis also had to sit this one out with injuries.

And just to add to Lawrence's problems, midfielder Graham Alexander hobbled off holding his thigh with 13 minutes on the clock.

He was replaced by Paul McClaren in midfield.

Luton started brightly and four minutes into the game Alexander crossed the ball to David Oldfield.

He met the ball well with a diving header but placed it just wide of the goal.

The 500 travelling Luton fans thought they should have had a penalty minutes later.

The lively Oldfield beat two defenders before rounding 'keeper Mark Walton.

Oldfield slipped and the ball fell to Dwight Marshall with the goal at his mercy.

Marshall looked up before blasting the ball straight at defender Robbie Herrera's arm, but referee Mark Pierce waved play on.

Walton was in inspirational form as he saved from teenager Stuart Douglas and Marshall.

The Fulham number one is currently keeping South African international stopper André Arendse out of the side.

During the week Arendse was playing in front of 95,000 fans as he helped South Africa become one of the first to qualify for next year's World Cup.

But he was back down to earth as he was forced to watch from the stands.

Meanwhile Luton 'keeper Kelvin Davies – deputising for the injured Feuer – also made some great saves.

Aidan Newhouse broke for the home side. He cut inside full back Julian James before hitting the ball across Davies' goal, but Davies scrambled across the goal-mouth to push the ball round the posts.

Luton continued to dominate in midfield but found it hard to get round the back of Fulham's defence.

Lawrence had obviously given his side instructions to look for Marshall playing wide on the right.

Marshall looked bright enough but in the middle Douglas seemed to lack the power to deal with centre-back Neil Smith.

Town's best chance of the first half came when Steve Davis nodded down Davies's corner. Oldfield reacted too slowly and only managed to toe-poke the ball wide of Walton's goal.

By MARTIN BUHAGIA

Just before the interval, Marshall broke clear of the Fulham defence but his control let him down as he over hit the ball into the oncoming Walton.

Marvin Johnson was booked early in the second half for a reckless challenge on Paul Brooker and Marshall and Steve Davies joined him in the book for needless offences.

Stuart Douglas should have done better with a point-blank header at 65 minutes after a good run and cross by Julian James.

In the 81st minute Paul Brooker broke for the home side. He beat Mitchell Thomas and Gary Waddock before firing a right foot drive to the top right hand corner of Davies' goal. But the Luton 'keeper was equal to the power and tipped the ball over the bar to give away a corner.

It was as exciting as you could expect a nil-nil draw to be but Luton fans were left wondering what the score might have been if hot-shot Thorpe had been playing.

After the game, a contented Lawrence said: "The draw was probably fair but we had the best chances and didn't make them count.

"Fulham looked good but were not really too much of a threat. I am just happy not to have lost today. If we are in the top half or thereabouts at the end of September I will be happy with that.

"We have had a few injuries but the young lads have come in and done very well."

Luton: Davies (K), James, Thomas, Waddock, Davis, Johnson, Davies (S), Alexander (McClaren, 11), Oldfield, Douglas, Marshall.



● Stuart Douglas closely marked



● Kelvin Davies tips a shot round the post on his recall



● Substitute McLaren battles through the middle

Good vibrations

Luton 1 Southend 0

FANS looking for pointers as to whether the Hatters can go one better than last season felt some good vibrations from their first home game on Monday, writes Bill Cole.

One of the club's major failings last term was their inability to grind out wins having taken the lead. That was put right on Monday.

Once Luton went in front through Stuart Douglas in the 75th minute, Southend presented little threat, despite

facing an injured goalkeeper.

Another problem which cost them dear last season did resurface after Ian Feuer had badly damaged an arm throwing the ball out on the half-hour. The Town's back four, their concentration disturbed, almost immediately left former West Ham striker Jeroen Boere totally unmarked for a free back post header that he should have buried.

But the positives outweighed the negatives. There were the usual solid games from Gary Waddock, Steve Davis and Martin Johnson, and the

midfield was organised and inventive, especially at the start.

Andrew Fotiadis survived some fearful stick, while Douglas injected pace up the middle when he came on and took up an intelligent position to claim his goal.

Perhaps the biggest bonuses were the performances of Simon Davies and Dwight Marshall. Davies looked real class on the night and Marshall threw of the physical and mental scars off that bad injury to show all his old pace and trickery.

POOLS CHECK:All matches one point except: 3pts: 1, 2, 9, 19, 31, 32, 45, 46. 2pts: 5, 12, 23, 25.