■ DAVE FLETT REPORTS: SENDING OFF SPARKS RARE HOME WIN AS THREE-GOAL LEAD GIVES ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS SAFETY

● PHIL THE FORCE: Sub Phil Gray powers home a header for his side's third goal against York.

● ON THE BRINK: Alan Wright celebrates Jason Allen's Wrington header.

● SPOTLIGHT: Graham Alexander strokes home Luton's first penalty of the season 35 minutes into Saturday's stunning game.

Hatters get a helping hand

YORK City's teenage debutant Graeme Rennison offered the Hatters a helping hand in their battle against relegation and it was one Lennie Lawrence's men did not let slip through their grasp.

Rennison, deputising for injured skipper Tony Barras, handled Rory Allen's goal-bound shot on the line and his first-team debut was curtailed after just 34 minutes.

Inconsiderable, the youngster had to be reminded of the importance of the dressing rooms by his team-mates, but Graham Alexander showed no mercy, stepping up to despatch the home side's first penalty of the season.

Another David Oldfield goal and one from Phil Gray, to end his 14-match goal drought, sealed maximum points for the Hatters and, most significantly, lifted them out of the Division Two drop zone.

The visitors' victory was complete when Mark Tinkler, moved back from midfield after Rennison's early bath, was also given his marching orders for a second bookable offence after a last-minute handbags at ten paces' altercation with Allen.

But while Tinkler's dismissal was too late in the game to have any impression on the final outcome, Rennison's was crucial.

Until the 18-year-old's premature exit, the game had followed a pattern familiar to Hatters home supporters this season with their side dominating first-half play, but unable to make the breakthrough and with York striker Rodney Rowe looking lively, referee David Crick's intervention couldn't have been better timed.

Lawrence's one-touch passing was again prominent in the Hatters' approach play, with the busy Sean Evers always available.

Ballooning

Looking for Dwight Marshall at every opportunity, much of the home side's threat came down the left flank where Mitchell Thomas overlapped to good effect.

Paul McLaren, who in midweek was recorded as possessing the most powerful shot in the club at 70mph, proved he still needs to work on his direction, ballooning an early chance well over the visitors' enclosure.

On 20 minutes Allen looked poised to add to last week's debut goal only to become the first victim of the greasy conditions, slipping with the ball dropping on to his head from inches yards out after Thomas' deep cross.

A minute later Alexander was close through but a wild swipe at the ball saw the Irishman slice wildly wide with the unmarked Oldfield screaming for a pass into the penalty box.

Even then had York keeper Andy Warrington back pedalling to tip his dipping 30-yarder over after a neat turn had completely bamboozled his marker.

Thomas was again the provider for the game's major talking point, when his cross from the left was unlucky-look completely by Oldfield.

His inadvertent dummy set up a shooting chance for Allen, who would have been celebrating his second goal had Rennison not handled.

Alexander drilled the spot kick past Warrington with unerring power and, on the stroke of half-time, the Hatters doubled their advantage when Oldfield got his name on the scoreboard for the second successive week.

Allen was again instrumental, sliding into dispossess York left-back Neil Thompson and, when the free ball broke to Oldfield, his squat build to Oldfield was confidently sidefooted into the top corner from the edge of the area.

Momentum

York, who had threatened themselves on occasions in the first half, Rowe sending a flashing volley just wide in the second minute, Richard Hanswell heading over when unmarked and Alan Poulton shooting straight at Kelvin Davis after inroads from the left, now looked like staging a dramatic limitation exercise.

The Hatters never really regained their first-half fluency until the final 10 minutes and Alan Little's Yorkshiremen displayed all the grit usually associated with their country to maintain a competitive edge to the game.

On 50 minutes Crewson's cross drifted on to Davis' crossbar and over, and, just past the hour, the Hatters number one had to palm a Poulton effort around the post before York's momentum was finally spent from long range.

Having lost their momentum, the home side finally radiated some urgency with the introductions of Gray and Alan White.

The unlucky Allen could have again scored, but his diving header went just wide after Alexander had skipped past the Thompson and crossed from the right.

The best move of the game then saw Warrington punch an Oldfield header on to the bar after Allen, Gray and Evers had combined to create the chance, the latter starting the move and racing forward in to send in a perfect cross for the Irish striker. With just five minutes left Gray completed the scoring, meeting Jones to the far post with a tenfoot downward header.

Right at the death second York man to see red after his tackle on Evers strikes off, and another appeared only to lash freely at a Gray one-two minutes later somewhere in Dunstable!

HATTERS 3
Alexander 35 pen, Oldfield 45, Gray 90

YORK CITY 0
Attendance: 5,541

● OFF YOU GO: Referee Crick waves away the protests led by keeper Andy Warrington after awarding the Hatters a penalty and showing debutant Graeme Rennison a red card for handball.

● WIZARD OF OZ: Aussie striker David Oldfield receives the congratulations of Paul McLaren after netting the Hatters' second goal with a cool sidefoot finish (below).

Pictures: Gareth Owen

LENNERDICT

[illegible] was our day. It [illegible] thanks for the [illegible] they must be a bit [illegible] the two send-[illegible] The ball was [illegible] in the goal [illegible] awarded a [illegible] that's the letter [illegible] The other, at [illegible] the 89th minute, [illegible] touch unnecessary.

LUTON TOWN FC 1997-98 THE STORY SO FAR ...

August	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att Pos
Sat 9	Grimsby Town	1-1		5,814 -
Sun 17	Millwall (CC1)	1-0	Thorpe 87	2,845
Sat 23	SOUTHEND	1-0	Douglas 75	5,140 12
Sun 31	Millwall (CC2)	1-1		2,845 -
Wed 3	MANCHESTER (CC1)	1-1	Thorpe 54	5,414 -
Sat 30	OLDHAM	2-0	Douglas, Thorpe	5,218 12
September				
Sun 6	MILLWALL	0-0		5,791 15
Sat 12	Bristol City	1-1		6,000 15
Sun 13	Millwall (CC2)	1-1	Marshall 43	4,985 -
Sats 19	WEST BROM (CC2)	1-1	Douglas 23	3,427 -
Sat 20	WREXHAM	1-1	Davis 31, Grey 80	5,277 23
Sat 27	West Brom (CC2)	3-3	Davis 51, Sill, Thorpe 73	4,000 -
October	Bristol City (CC3)	0-1		8,559 -
Sat 4	WATFORD	3-0		3,941 23
Sat 11	PLYMOUTH ARG	2-0	Thorpe 30, Jn. Davies 81	5,000 20
Sat 18	Crewe	1-0	Thorpe 90	4,000 20
Sat 25	Bristol City	1-0	Wilkie 90	4,351 15
Sat 31	BRENTFORD	2-0	Allen 20, Thorpe 89	5,000 12
November				
Sat 1	Wycombe	2-3	Oldfield 18, Thorpe 74	6,219 18
Sat 8	Bristol Rovers	2-0	Thorpe 20, 90	6,000 15
Sat 15	PRESTON	2-3	Thorpe 25	5,240 22
Sat 22	TORQUAY (ATCH)	1-1		4,000 -
Sat 29	WALSALL	2-1		5,106 20
Tues 2	Bristol City	0-1	Alexander 13, Thorpe 72	4,000 -
December				
Sats 3	GILLINGHAM	2-2	Davis 18, Oldfield 77	5,806 21
Sat 6	Bristol Rovers	1-1		6,000 -
Sat 20	BRISTOL ROVERS	2-1	Allen 9, Oldfield 90	5,000 -
Sat 26	Bournemouth	0-0		9,263 21
Sun 28	Torquay	2-0	Oldfield 30, Thorpe 90	4,000 -
January				
Sat 3	Wrexham	2-1	Alexander 41, 90	5,000 19
Sat 10	BLACKPOOL	1-1	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
Sat 17	HERTFORD (AWS)	2-1	Thorpe 33, Oldfield 85	3,000 -
Sat 24	Watford	1-1	Thorpe 90	6,000 -
Sat 31	FULHAM	1-0	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
February				
Sat 7	Hertford (AWS)	1-1	Thorpe 90	2,000 -
Sat 14	BOURNEMOUTH	1-2	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
Sat 21	Fulham	1-1	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
Sat 28	Grimsby Town	1-1	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
March				
Sat 14	Watford	1-1	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
Sat 21	Blackpool	1-1	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
Sat 28	BRISTOL CITY	1-1		5,000 -
Sat 4	Preston	1-1	Oldfield 90	4,000 -
Sat 11	Plymouth Arg	1-1	Oldfield, Thorpe 90	5,000 -
April				
Sat 18	WYCOMBE	3-1		5,000 -
Sat 25	Southend	1-1	Thorpe 90	3,000 -
Sat 2	BURNLEY	1-1	Thorpe 90	5,000 -
Sat 9	Walsall	3-2	Oldfield 25, Allen 58, Mullen 70	5,000 -
May				
Sat 2	YORK CITY	3-0	Alexander, Thorpe, Oldfield	5,541 -
Sat 9	Gillingham	2-4		7,48 -
Sat 16	CHESTERFIELD	1-0		5,45 -
Sat 23	Bristol Rovers	1-1		6,000 -
Sat 30	Brentford	1-1		5,000 -

NATIONWIDE LEAGUE DIVISION TWO

	Pld	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Bristol City	41	24	9	8	33	81
Fulham	41	24	9	8	30	81
Grimsby Town	41	18	11	12	16	65
Luton Town	41	18	11	12	15	65
Wrexham	41	18	10	13	13	64
Bournemouth	41	18	10	13	12	64
Blackpool	41	17	12	12	11	63
Watford	41	17	12	12	10	63
Burnley	41	17	12	12	9	63
Bristol Rovers	41	16	10	15	10	60
Chesterfield	41	16	10	15	8	60
Bournemouth	40	14	9	17	10	51
Brentford	40	14	9	17	5	51
Oldham	41	14	10	17	4	52
Preston	41	14	10	17	3	52
Gillingham	41	14	10	17	2	52
Walsall	41	13	13	14	4	52
Wycombe	41	13	11	17	4	50
Wigan Athletic	40	13	9	18	5	48
Millwall	41	13	9	19	5	48
Southend	41	13	9	19	4	48
Plymouth Arg	41	13	9	19	3	48
Burnley	41	13	9	19	2	48
Bristol City	41	13	9	19	1	48
Chesterfield	41	13	9	19	1	48
Brentford	41	13	9	19	1	48
Preston	41	13	9	19	1	48
Watford	41	13	9	19	1	48
Bristol Rovers	41	13	9	19	1	48
Blackpool	41	13	9	19	1	48
Wrexham	41	13	9	19	1	48
Fulham	41	13	9	19	1	48
Grimsby Town	41	13	9	19	1	48
Luton Town	41	13	9	19	1	48
Bournemouth