

■ Town woe: Bogey side strike again to ruin Luton's Christmas



■ Paul Showler takes a tumble on his first team return



■ Steve Davis sees his shot blocked

Lions maul sad Hatters

THE Lions of Millwall gave the Hatters a good mauling at Kenilworth Road yesterday.

It is the third consecutive season that they have won there.

Total domination of the first half and a late rally all came to nothing as Luton failed to get back into the play-off picture despite having some great chances to take full control of the game.

Indeed, a couple of incredible saves by golden oldie Nigel Spink was the difference between victory and defeat yesterday.

Millwall took the lead against the run of play at the end of the first half and, after Steve Davis' power drive following a corner put Luton back into the game, a quick break led to Lucas Neill smashing the winner between Kelvin Davis and his near post eight minutes from time.

Luton's much changed line-up, with Andre Scarlett making his starting debut and Stuart Fraser only his second league start, began the game in great style.

The ball hadn't been out of the visitors' half before some super passing led to Paul Showler firing a shot on target, but it was blocked.

Steve Davis made a typical run through the

Luton Town 1 Millwall 2
By BILL COLE

middle, played a one-two and got a power drive away but another Millwall foot deflected the ball over the bar, and from the resulting corner Davis' header suffered the same fate.

The Lions got their act together with a quickly taken free-kick that put Paul Shaw away and Marvin Johnson was lucky not to concede a free-kick with a tackle from behind that saved the day for the Hatters.

Scarlett was proving a revelation on the right wing getting in copious crosses to the Millwall box from close to the by-line, but the final ball always frustratingly fell just out of reach of a white shirt.

One Scarlett cross led to Showler almost putting Luton ahead, but his first attempt was blocked and his effort from the ricochet went inches wide.

Stuart Douglas, then Gray, had shots blocked before Steve Davis brought a splendid save from Spink as the Hatters pressed.

Spink then had to distinguish himself again with a brilliant reaction save on the half hour to keep out a snap shot from Gray.

Despite being under the cosh for most of the

first half, Millwall had fashioned a chance or two themselves but their finishing was poor.

That is until half-time loomed when they broke away to take the lead.

Not only did the second best team turn round a goal to the good, but the best player on the field was at fault in the build-up.

Steve Davis misplaced his attempted clearing header from a Spink's hopeful punt and Neil Harris found himself clean through on the inside left. He ran on to beat Kelvin Davis with as clean a low strike as you are likely to see.

Luton's good football totally dissolved after the restart as the crowd began to get on their backs and the visitors contrived to either miss with several great opportunities or to take the wrong option with their final ball.

But the Town gradually got back into things and on 68 minutes Scarlett shaved the post with a skimming drive and moments later Davis equalised.

Matthew Spring deputised for the withdrawn Showler as the taker of corners and it was his kick that drifted to the far post where the Town skipper was on hand to fire home from close range.

Town boss Lennie Lawrence took a gamble by throwing Steve Davis up into attack by bringing

Alan White on into defence and taking Phil Gray off.

But the move back-fired. Within a minute of coming on, White got himself booked by bringing Shaw down just short of the Town penalty area. Kelvin Davis made a super save from the free kick but another Shaw run soon afterwards led to Millwall's winner.

McGowan, already booked, had to let Shaw run on into the Town box as the Lions mounted a break out of defence. Lucas Neill, up with Shaw, muscled his fellow striker out of the way to thump a shot past Davis.

Even then Luton had a chance to make it four league draws running but deep into injury time, as the Millwall defence parted invitingly, Douglas and Davis went for the same ball and the chance went begging.

So Luton's bogey team grabbed a hat-trick that Luton will want to forget, and spoilt the Town's Christmas.

Luton K Davis, McGowan, Fraser, Spring, S Davis, Johnson, Scarlett, McLaren, Douglas, Gray (White 77) Showler (Fotiadis 63). Sub not used: McIndoe.

Booked: McGowan 15, White 78.

Man of the match: Andre Scarlett.

Attendance: 5939.