

# Tempers flare with bookings galore at Layer Road

# ABRAHAM'S SAVES U'S

98/99

Colchester .....2  
Luton .....2

By CARL MARSTON

## TEAMS

### COLCHESTER:

Fernandes, Dunne, Betts, Williams, Greene, Buckle, Wilkins, D. Gregory, Sale, Abrahams, Duguid.

Subs: N. Gregory, Lock, Haydon.

### LUTON:

Davis, Alexander, Thomas, Spring, White, Johnson, McLaren, Harrison, Douglas, Gray, Evers.

Subs: McIndoe, Doherty, Fraser.



Referee: Mr. Barry Knight (Orpington, Kent).

Attendance: 4,694

**TAMER** Fernandes was making his Colchester United debut in goal against visitors Luton Town this afternoon.

Regular number one keeper, Carl Emberson, who will be suspended for the trip to Chesterfield next weekend, made way for former Brentford custodian Fernandes today.

This was one of four changes from the side that tumbled to a 3-0 home defeat against Bristol Rovers last Monday.

Out went strikers Jason Dozzell, Neil Gregory and Tony Lock, to be replaced by target-man Mark Sale and wingers Paul Abrahams and Karl Duguid.

Luton were on the attack in the very first minute and Fernandes got the faintest of touches to a cross by Evers, otherwise the U's would have been in trouble.

Luton midfielder, McLaren, was booked in the second minute for a late tackle on defender Dunne. The U's right back needed treatment on the sideline before he was able to continue.

Skipper Wilkins was in the right place to prevent the visitors from taking the lead when he hacked away a shot by Spring following a pin-point cross from Douglas.

From the ensuing corner, U's debutant Fernandes gathered a

low drive by Spring at the second attempt.

**ALEXANDER** put Luton ahead from the penalty spot in the seventh minute.

Betts was adjudged to have fouled Gray in the penalty area and referee Barry Knight had no hesitation in pointing to the spot, even though he was some way behind play.

Right-back Alexander gave Fernandes no chance with his spot kick, firing home low to the keeper's right.

Abrahams squandered a good chance to equalise in the 16th minute. He pounced onto a cross by fellow winger Duguid, but screwed his shot well wide from just ten yards out.

At the other end, Fernandes made a superb save to prevent McLaren from adding a second goal. McLaren toe-poked goalwards at the far post, only for Fernandes to claw the ball away with an outstretched hand.

**D. GREGORY** equalised for the U's, with the game's second penalty in the 20th minute.

Sale was chopped down in the box by defender Johnson, and referee Mr. Knight again pointed to the spot.

Hatters' keeper Davis got his hand to D. Gregory's penalty kick, guessing the right way by diving low to his right. But he was unable to prevent the ball from dribbling into the net.

It was D. Gregory's eighth goal of the season, and his fifth

in the League. It was his sixth goal from the penalty spot.

It had been a frenetic opening and this continued when defender Betts was booked in the 26th minute for a late tackle on front-runner Douglas.

Luton had created chances galore in the first half-hour and Fernandes again came to United's rescue in the 28th minute when blocking a goal-bound header by McLaren at the far post.

In the 31st minute, D. Gregory became the third player to be booked for a late sliding tackle on McLaren.

Two minutes later, target-man Sale was also shown the yellow card for a foul on Alexander, and not long afterwards Luton centre-half Johnson was the fifth player to be cautioned for another late challenge.

The U's then had two quick-fire chances to grab the lead. First, Abrahams skipped his way into the penalty area before firing over the top, and then Duguid ran clear before pulling a shot across goal.

Sale had an opportunity in the 44th minute when meeting a cross by Duguid with a header that looped into the arms of keeper Davis.

That was the last chance of an open and entertaining, if scrappy, first period. Half time: **Colchester 1, Luton 1**

Within 30 seconds of the restart, Abrahams tried his luck from 30 yards out with a shot that flew well wide of goal.

A combination of keeper

Davis and the woodwork prevented Colchester from taking the lead in the 51st minute. Abrahams swung over a deep cross and Sale powered in a thunderous header that Davis managed to push onto the underside of the bar.

Tempers were boiling over and a pumped-up Alexander was booked for an off-the-ball incident with Buckle in the 58th minute. That made it six bookings inside the first hour.

Hatters' assistant manager, John Moore, was then ordered out of the dug-out to watch the rest of the game from the stands by referee Mr. Knight, presumably for dissent.

At this stage Mr. Knight was struggling to keep control of proceedings and he then awarded a free-kick just outside the U's box for a foul on Gray by Duguid. Spring ended up firing well over the top from a well-executed free-kick routine. Luton made their first substitution in the 65th minute when Doherty replaced Douglas in attack.

Fernandes fell awkwardly while punching away a cross by Alexander at full stretch. He seemed to fall heavily on his neck, but was able to continue after treatment.

**Luton regained the lead in the 72nd minute with WHITE** volleying home at the far post.

Unmarked centre-half White was able to ghost in unchallenged to volley home a corner by Spring. Ironically, White was only playing because of Steve Davis' transfer to Burnley for £800,000 earlier in the week.

United reacted by making their first change of the afternoon with striker Lock replacing Duguid.

Abrahams should have equalised in the 75th minute when he pounced onto a poor back pass. But he aimed his shot straight at Davis, who was able to save with a degree of comfort.

The home side then made a double substitution in the 80th minute when N. Gregory and Haydon came on for Sale and Williams.

**Back came Colchester and ABRAHAM'S drilled home the equaliser in the 84th minute.**

The U's packed numbers into the Luton penalty area and when the ball fell for Abrahams, who was lurking on the edge of the box, he cracked home a right-footed low drive into the far corner of the net, giving keeper Davis no chance. It was an excellent finish from Abrahams, his first goal since last August.

United were now pouring forward in numbers, and in the 89th minute N. Gregory tried to put Abrahams away. But keeper Davis raced off his line to smother before Abrahams could pounce.

In injury time, D. Gregory came very close to converting a cross by substitute Haydon, but he was just inches away from getting an all important touch on the edge of the six-yard box.

There were four minutes of injury time but neither side could find a winner. Result:

**Colchester 2, Luton 2**



● David Gregory equalised from the penalty spot for Colchester.