

DAVE FLETT watches the Hatters start 1999 by labouring to a



● MIGHTY WHITE: Alan White nets Matthew Spring's corner at the far post.



LIFE AFTER



● UNLUCKY 13: Hatters substitute Gary Doherty is foiled in this aerial battle in Colchester, despite a helping hand from team-mate Sean Evers.

STEVE DAVIS has gone and any lingering play-off hopes have almost definitely disappeared with him.

But for cash-strapped Luton Town life must go on. How difficult it will be without their talismanic leader was illustrated by Saturday's grim 2-2 draw at Colchester United.

Colchester are a Division Three side who stumbled into Division Two via the play-offs.

They looked exactly that against the Hatters. Sadly, for the loyal band of travelling supporters, a Davis-less Luton looked little better.

Burnley's new £800,000 signing, justifiably labelled "the best defender in Division Two" by Lennie Lawrence, would have injected some much-needed class into a desperately drab encounter devoid of quality.

And Lawrence now faces the biggest test of his difficult managerial career at Kenilworth Road - filling the gaping hole left by the loss of Davis' majestic confidence and leadership ability.

A master of scoring and creating, as well as stopping, goals Davis is irreplaceable considering Luton Town's parlous financial state.

David Kohler has made no secret of his need to sell in recent weeks and Davis left for Burnley because the Lancastrians made the first realistic bid for any of the club's star men.

Matthew Spring, Sean Evers and Kelvin Davis could all have gone if any of a number of interested clubs had put their money where their mouth was but Davis' consistency and proven quality always made him the most likely to leave.

Resigned

His absence, therefore, will inevitably be felt the hardest. The only solace in Davis' departure is that selling their best players is hardly a notion foreign to Luton Town which perhaps explains the lack of any real protest at Layer Road from Hatters fans resigned to losing their inspirational skipper.

Marvin Johnson, who now has the responsibility of donning Davis' captain's armband, has seen it all before in his 12 years at Kenilworth Road and is hoping the club can bounce back yet again from the disappointment of losing a key player.

Speaking after his first game as skipper on Saturday, Johnson said: "I just hope all the lads, including myself, can respond in the way we should to the sale of Steve Davis."

"We've got to get on with it. Selling our best players has always been the way at this club."

"I've seen a few come and go. Steve's been outstanding this season but we're a selling club."

Alan White was handed the unenviable task of filling Davis' boots against Colchester and responded well, putting the Hatters ahead for a second time on 72 minutes.

Comparing White to Davis would be unfair, not least because they are very different players, but, like Paul McLaren, the 22-year-old defender wears his heart on his sleeve and these are the type of players Lawrence may need to place his faith in as the Hatters scrap for points in 1999.

Other youngsters, such as Evers and Stuart Douglas, are clearly struggling to



reproduce their early season form.

How Lawrence juggles his team selection resources at his disposal, will be vital.

Douglas, in particular, with just two goals in 16 games, seems in need of a first team rest.

Phil Gray has also struggled of late in his inability to keep a clean sheet, with or without the fragile confidence in evidence at Colchester.

The Hatters have surprisingly scored more in the division but have still not kept a clean league and cup games since the opening day.

Wanderers.

With Davis gone, that will be a hard task.

Lawrence hopes to address with this week's Dyche.

Despite leading twice, Kelvin Davis's second-half goal was not enough to prevent Colchester scoring more than their visitors.

The former England Under-21 keeper was smothered by a Paul Abrahams' 21st-minute penalty, getting a kick but only helping it in off a post.

Davis then kept out beanpole striker Mark Grogan's 21st-minute penalty, getting a kick but only helping it in off a post.

Graham Alexander, a generous 20th-minute goal, was a generous 20th-minute goal.

Layer Road bookmakers, duly obliged by the 20th-minute goal, were a generous 20th-minute goal.

Evers had been bundled over in the 16th minute.

Decision.

Fernandes was making his debut in the 16th minute.

and did his chances of staying between the first-half stops from White and McLaren.

range.

Colchester got back on level terms when Johnson's lunge and Gregory squeezed the ball over the goal line.

The visitors struggled for attacking momentum before the break, being forced further back by Evers, who occupied an advanced position.

Frustration boiled over and Alexander earned him a yellow card and coach, John

against a lowly Colchester side



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● SEEING RED: Luton Town coach John Moore is ordered to leave the dug-out after questioning the referee's decision to give Graham Alexander a yellow card in the second-half.



decision. The disappointing Douglas was replaced by an ineffective Gary Doherty but three points might have been snatched when White ghosted in at the far post to volley home Spring's deep corner.

Six minutes from the end, Abrahams, guilty of missing three earlier chances, accepted the hardest of the afternoon when he turned on the edge of the area and drilled a low shot past Davis.

The goal was more inevitable than surprising with three of the Hatters last four away games ending in 2-2 draws.

Discussing his side's fading play-off hopes, Lawrence tried to remain upbeat despite another two points dropped. He said: "I'm just thinking about improving the performance. If you get to transfer deadline day and you are more than six points away from the play-offs you're probably not going to do it."

"But there's so many games and such a long way to go, you just don't know. We've taken a very small step in the right direction."

"We were OK in the first-half, controlled most of the second, got a well-worked goal from the set-piece corner and then it went downhill."

"We surrendered a situation where we had three points and, to be quite frank, we were a bit lucky not to lose in the last 15 minutes."

"In fairness to Colchester over 90 minutes they deserved a draw, but I think we did better than we have been doing."

COLCHESTER UNITED: Tamar Fernandes, Joe Dunne, Simon Betts, Geraint Williams (Nicky Haydon, 80), David Greene, Paul Buckle, Richard Wilkins, David Gregory, Mark Sale (Neil Gregory, 80), Paul Abrahams, Karl Duguid (Tony Lock, 73).

HATTERS: Kelvin Davis, Graham Alexander, Mitchell Thomas, Matthew Spring, Alan White, Marvin Johnson, Paul McLaren, Gerry Harrison (Gary Doherty, 65), Stuart Douglas, Phil Gray, Sean Evers. Subs not used: Michael McIndoe, Stuart Fraser.

LUTON TOWN FC 1998-99

August	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Sat 8	Wycombe	1-0	Davis (S) 36	5,252	10
Tues 11	OXFORD UTD (WC1)	2-3	Alexander 59 (pen), 63 (pen)	3,185	-
Sat 15	PRESTON	1-1	Marshall 54	5,392	7
Tues 18	Oxford Utd (WC1)	3-1	Gray 37, Evers 48, McLaren 70	5,099	-
Sat 22	Reading	0-3		18,108	12
Sat 29	COLCHESTER	2-0	Douglas 62, Davis (S) 82	5,005	9
Mon 31	Wigan Athletic	3-1	Davis (S) 41, Evers 78, Gray 81	3,778	5
September					
Sat 5	BURNLEY	1-0	Douglas 47	5,554	2
Tues 8	Wrexham	1-1	McKinnon 36	2,951	3
Sat 12	BRISTOL ROVERS	2-0	Davis (S) 7, Alexander 9	5,558	3
Tues 15	Ipswich (WC 2)	1-2	Douglas, 60	9,032	-
Sat 19	Blackpool	0-1		5,695	5
Tues 22	IPSWICH (WC 2)	4-2	Fotiadis 52, Douglas 83, Davis (S) 99, Johnson 120	5,655	-
Sat 26	WALSALL	0-1		5,530	7
October					
Sat 3	Fulham	3-1	Gray 3, Douglas 48, Davis (S) 65	11,856	7
Sat 10	York City	3-3	Douglas 22, Evers 43, Gray 55	3,780	4
Sat 17	OLDHAM	2-0	Gray 82, Scarlett 90	5,447	4
Tues 20	NORTHAMPTON	1-0	Alexander 19	6,087	3
Sat 24	Gillingham	0-1		5,602	4
Tues 27	COVENTRY (WC 3)	2-0	Gray 50, Davis (S) 78	9,051	-
November					
Sat 7	Stoke City	1-3	Douglas 81	12,964	6
Tues 10	BARNLEY (WC4)	1-0	Gray 82	8,435	-
Sun 15	Boreham Wood (FA1)	3-2	Gray 33, 53, Davis (S) 76	1,772	-
Sat 21	Lincoln City	2-2	Gray 43, Doherty 76	4,893	6
Sat 28	MANCHESTER CITY	1-1	Doherty 76	9,070	7
December					
Tue 1	Sunderland (WC5)	0-3		35,742	-
Sat 5	HULL CITY (FA2)	1-2	Davis (S) 36	5,021	-
Sat 12	Macclesfield	2-2	Douglas 3, Gray 90	2,905	8
Sat 19	MILLWALL	1-2	Davis (S) 69	5,939	11
Mon 28	Bournemouth	0-1		8,863	14
January					
Sat 2	Colchester	2-2	Alexander (pen) 7, White 72	4,694	14
Tues 5	WALSALL (AWS 2)	H	7.45		
Sat 9	WYCOMBE	H	3		
Sat 16	Preston	A	3		
Sat 23	WIGAN ATHLETIC	H	3		
Sat 30	BOURNEMOUTH	H	3		
February					
Sat 6	Burnley	A	3		
Sat 13	WREXHAM	H	3		
Sat 20	Bristol Rovers	A	3		
Sat 27	BLACKPOOL	H	3		
March					
Sat 6	Walsall	A	3		
Tues 9	FULHAM	H	7.45		
Sat 13	STOKE CITY	H	3		
Sat 20	Chesterfield	A	3		
Sat 27	GILLINGHAM	H	3		
April					
Sat 3	Oldham Athletic	A	3		
Tues 6	YORK CITY	H	7.45		
Sat 10	Northampton	A	3		
Wed 14	Manchester City	A	3		
Sat 17	LINCOLN CITY	H	3		
Sat 24	Notts County	A	3		
May					
Sat 1	MACCLESFIELD	H	3		
Sat 8	Millwall	A	3		

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DIVISION TWO

Up to January 3 1999	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fulham	23	15	4	4	36	17	49
Walsall	25	14	5	6	35	28	47
Stoke City	24	14	2	8	31	19	44
Preston	23	12	7	4	41	23	43
Gillingham	24	10	11	3	35	19	41
Bournemouth	22	11	6	5	35	22	39
Man City	24	9	9	6	28	22	36
Chesterfield	24	10	6	8	25	20	36
York City	25	9	7	9	35	41	34
Wigan Athletic	24	9	7	8	31	23	34
Reading	23	9	7	7	27	29	34
Blackpool	25	8	9	8	29	29	33
Millwall	24	8	9	7	24	26	33
LUTON TOWN	22	8	7	7	29	26	31
Bristol Rovers	23	6	10	7	27	25	28
Colchester Utd	24	6	9	9	23	32	27
Burnley	25	6	8	11	26	40	26
Northampton	24	5	10	9	23	27	25
Wrexham	24	6	7	11	22	33	25
Notts County	23	6	6	11	26	34	24
Wycombe Wdrs	25	5	8	12	24	31	23
Oldham	24	5	6	13	23	38	21
Macclesfield	24	4	9	11	19	30	21
Lincoln City	24	4	5	15	23	43	17

GAMES AND GOALS

Player	Apps	Goals
Graham Alexander	19(0)	9(0)
Hervé Bacqué	2(5)	1(2)
Jimmy Cox	2(2)	1(1)
Kevin Davis	22(0)	9(0)
Steve Davis	20(0)	9(0)
Simon Davies	2(0)	0(0)
Gary Doherty	0(5)	1(2)
Stuart Douglas	19(0)	7(1)
Sean Evers	21(0)	9(0)
Andrew Fotiadis	2(8)	1(2)
Stuart Fraser	1(0)	0(0)
Liam George	2(3)	0(2)
Phil Gray	21(1)	0(0)
Gerry Harrison	2(0)	0(0)
Marvin Johnson	20(0)	8(0)
Dwight Marshall	3(1)	3(0)
Gavin McGowan	16(1)	9(0)
Michael McIndoe	8(2)	2(3)
Ray McKinnon	16(1)	6(1)
Paul McLaren	4(4)	3(3)
Kofi Nyamah	0(0)	1(1)
Andre Scarlett	1(2)	0(1)
Paul Showler	2(1)	0(0)
Matthew Spring	22(0)	8(1)
Mitchell Thomas	11(5)	3(0)
Alan White	5(9)	1(3)

BAD BOYS

PLAYER	Y
Gavin McGowan	11
Graham Alexander	7
Marvin Johnson	4
Mitchell Thomas	4
Steve Davis	6
Stuart Douglas	3
Paul McLaren	3
Liam George	2
Phil Gray	2
Michael McIndoe	2
Alan White	2
Jimmy Cox	1
Gary Doherty	1
Sean Evers	1
Ray McKinnon	1
Matthew Spring	1
Total	51