



■ Kelvin Davis walks away as he is shown the red card



■ Sean Dyche is beaten by a Roy Carroll punch

Careless hands prove costly for sad Hatters

98/99



■ Gavin McGowan and stand-in keeper Gerry Harrison

A little balding man with a red and yellow flag incensed the whole of Kenilworth Road.

Come the end of 90 minutes the flag-waving antics of linesman Chris Hills could have expected a friendlier reception in the streets of Pamplona in bull-run week.

First he waved furiously when referee Gurnham Singh seemed like he was going to give Hatters' keeper Kelvin Davis the benefit of the doubt after he had apparently handled outside the box.

But Mr Hills was having none of it – and Luton were left without a specialist keeper for nearly an hour.

Six minutes later the chequered flag was nowhere to be seen and Andy Liddell received the ball in acres of space and coolly slotted home to leave Hatters a two-goal mountain to climb.

Emergency keeper Gerry Harrison – who later revealed he had played in goal for Watford reserves in similar circumstances – did his best, and pulled off two fine late stops, but was powerless against a Wigan onslaught.

To add insult to injury Mr Hills still had time to chalk off a stoppage-time Alan White consolation – raising a late flag to bring an earlier infringement to Mr Singh's attention.

The eagle-eyed official from Ely had apparently spotted Gavin McGowan's far-post cross loop out of play off a defender's boot, before curling back under the crossbar for White to nod home.

As Lenny Lawrence conceded it was one of those days.

After a bright start the visitors went ahead as early as the 14th minute courtesy of an Alan White error.

**Luton Town 0
Wigan Athletic 4**
By PETE KENYON

Michael O'Neill swung a corner into the near-post, White, under pressure, flicked-on perfectly across his own goal and Pat McGibbon flung himself in to head past the stranded Davis.

Eight minutes later came the flash-point that turned the match.

Andy Liddell played a long ball out of defence and with the back four pushing forward Graeme Jones sprang the offside trap and nudged the ball past the advancing Davis who appeared to handle as he challenged.

The Hatters' keeper got his marching orders and the game looked finished.

So it proved on 28 minutes when Liddell latched onto Kevin Sharpe's through-ball, drew Harrison, and fired home.

In fact Harrison's first touch of the ball in his new-found position was to take the ball out of the net.

But Luton never gave up and only a great save from Wigan's Roy Carroll denied them a goal just before half time.

Matthew Spring's free-kick took a wicked deflection but Andy Fotiadis' header from close-range was somehow clawed away by the alert Wigan keeper.

Three minutes after the break L'Andrey Zahana-Oni fluffed an excellent chance to narrow the arrears but scuffed his shot at the far-post following good work by Spring and Sean Dyche.

Substitute Gary Doherty was denied only by a frantic goal-line clearance by Scott Green – a feat the Wigan defender would repeat two minutes later.

At this point it looked like Hatters might make a miraculous recovery, but totally against the run of play Wigan killed the game with a third goal by Jones.

Even that had more than a touch of fortune about it – the ball breaking to Sharp on the left wing from a cruel deflection off Dyche's back.

Hatters gave up the ghost and were lucky not to be hit for six.

Wigan substitute Simon Hayworth – who at £600,000 cost more than three times the whole of Luton's side (including substitutes) – made it 4-0 13 minutes from time with a super strike.

After the match Gerry Harrison said: "The sending-off changed the game completely. Their attacker might have scored then to make it 2-0, but we could still have had a chance to get back in it with 11 men on the pitch.

"Kelvin *did* handle it outside the box, but I'm not sure whether it was more a case of ball to hand than hand to ball."

Hatters manager Lennie Lawrence said: "It wasn't our day really, just as it wasn't for Wycombe here two weeks ago.

"At 3-0 it was over, but even that goal was very fortunate.

"Wigan are a good side but you must remember that today we had just two bought players in the entire team, and one of those from the Ryman League – the rest are all frees, loans and young players."

Luton: Davis (sent off 22mins), Harrison, White, Spring, Dyche, Johnson, McGowan, Evers, Douglas, Fotiadis (Doherty 48mins), Zahana-Oni (McIndoe 64mins). Sub not used: Scarlett. Attendance: 4,934.

Man of the match: Harrison.