



Town's hearts broken as lead goes down the pan



TWO arrow-like strikes inside five minutes broke Hatters' hearts.

After spending 50 minutes building up a two-goal cushion, Luton flushed all the good work down the pan.

When Gary Doherty poked home Hatters' second just after the break, Luton looked to have laid the recent Bournemouth bogey to rest.

But the promotion-chasing Cherries – with ten wins in their last 12 matches – took just nine minutes to grab a lifeline.

That Hatters survived that long was a minor miracle in itself.

Steve Robinson's cross across goal was agonisingly out-of-reach of John O'Neill and ex-Hatter Mark Stein. And seconds later Hatters skipper Marvin Johnson, who appeared to be revelling in his new-found position as captain, stopped a certain goal with a timely block on O'Neill's close-range effort.

Stuart Douglas earned the derision of Kenilworth Road by squandering an excellent chance to crush the Cherries with a killer third and two minutes later his hesitation when clean through on goal was punished.

O'Neill's cross from the right took a kind deflection into the path of Robinson, but it still took a wonderful strike on the half-volley to complete the job.

On 68 minutes Gavin McGowan earned a yellow card for a professional foul on the lightning-quick Stein right on the edge of the box and from the resulting free kick Jamie Vincent smashed a low drive which deflected wickedly off the unfortunate Matthew Spring past a helpless Kelvin Davis.

Luton Town 2 Bournemouth 2 By PETE KENYON

Two minutes later Vincent left a carbon-copy free kick to Stein and must be wondering why he didn't try his luck again as the pint-sized striker made a complete hash of it.

To Luton's credit they stopped the rot after that devastating five-minute blitz, and Spring was desperately unlucky with a 20-yard half-volley which flashed inches wide.

But in the post mortem of yesterday's topsy-turvy affair manager Lenny Lawrence should be questioning his own decision to keep a disinterested-looking Stuart Douglas on the pitch as long as he did.

After picking up a knock late in the first half, then bringing up his pre-match lunch in the dressing room at half time, Douglas spent most of the second period in considerably more danger of tripping over his own lip than the ball.

Lawrence conceded after the match that he might have left Douglas on for too long but said that with only the inexperienced Landry Zahana-Oni and Andre Scarlett on the bench he had little option.

With Douglas struggling, hard-running Gary Doherty was left to do all the second half pressing up-front and when he inevitably ran out of steam, Bournemouth were able to build from the back for the first time in the match.

In fairness to Douglas who set-up Doherty for the second and pressed hard early-on, he didn't have a bad first half.

Perhaps the appearance on the horizon of Tony Thorpe, who rode into the sunset in the other direction nearly a year ago, might have something to do with Douglas' down-beat demeanour.

Thorpe has had a rough time of it since his £800,000 departure to Fulham and then Bristol City and Lawrence is close to securing a three-month loan of the former Hatters golden-boy.

With Phil Gray and Graham Alexander almost back in the reckoning and with Ray McKinnon back after an eight-match lay-off Lawrence will be looking for better things now that the seniors are back.

Indeed it was McKinnon who nosed Luton ahead after only five minutes of yesterday's match after latching onto Jerry Harrison's deflected cross and hammering home on the half-volley from 15 yards.

Spring came close after a one-two with Doherty but fizzed a shot inches wide and Doherty was unlucky not to win either a free kick or a penalty after being hauled down by Eddie Howe while clean through.

Sean Evers had a good chance to grab a second before the break, as did Spring who dispossessed Howe on the edge of the Bournemouth box only to strike a 15-yard effort straight at keeper Mark Ovendale.

Team: Davis, Harrison (White 79), McGowan, Spring, Dyche, Johnson, Evers, McLaren, Douglas (Zahana-Oni 74), Doherty, McKinnon, Sub not used: Scarlett. Attendance: 5,426.

Man of the match: Johnson.