

Sorry Hatters fall to Stoke

SOME might say Hatters need a new stadium.

Some a new chairman. Others a new manager, and possibly some new players. Perhaps.

But what Luton really need – and now – is a new set of supporters.

Many of those in the main stand yesterday might as well have worn red and white scarves and shouted for Stoke for all the use they were to Luton.

Abuse, sarcasm and on occasions downright nastiness not so much emanated as gushed from large parts of the main stand.

Dejected Lennie Lawrence went off to the customary catcalls of 'Lawrence out' at half time – by far the highest decibel count of the day – even though his side could consider themselves somewhat unfortunate to be 2-0 down.

Alan White – desperately lacking in confidence after his midweek sending off and another yellow card yesterday – was jeered cruelly off the pitch as he was replaced by Chris Willmott 12 minutes from time.

And Stuart Douglas coach Mitchell Thomas and Matthew Spring were constantly barracked by large sections of a hostile crowd.

Many who attend Kenilworth Road at the moment do not even deserve to be called supporters, liabilities would be a better descriptive term.

That Luton played poorly – especially in an opening 16 minutes in which Thomas was made to pay for two defensive errors – is not in dispute.

But give Stoke credit for some defensive

**Luton Town 1
Stoke City 2
By PETE KENYON**

resilience – and, but for some unlucky runs of the ball, Hatters might have scrapped a draw.

Struggling City might have gone into yesterday's match with a marginally worse run than Luton – nine defeats in 11 games compared to Hatters' six in seven – but sides with the resources of Stoke do not become bad overnight and after yesterday's result the Potters are two points behind the play-off position with a game in hand in the sixth-placed side.

But while Hatters' liabilities did their best to drain any confidence left in the dressing room, Stoke's fans were at least consistent.

Their calls for their board to be sacked echoed around the Oak Road even when they were 2-0 up.

It took the visitors just ten mins to take the lead.

A hopeful cross into the box was headed down to Chris Short, but as he gave chase towards the corner flag Thomas stuck out a tentacle and the Stoke man needed no second invitation to hit the deck with the style and technique of an Olympic diver.

Graham Kavanagh slotted home the spot kick, despite Kelvin Davis's best efforts to repeat his midweek penalty save.

Six minutes later another innocuous looking ball was skied into Hatters' box, but Thomas headed straight into Kavanagh's path.

With time and space, the Stoke midfielder

scuffed his close range shot but Davis allowed the effort to squirm under his body when he really should have saved.

Without having looked threatening, the visitors were 2-0 up and Hatters had a mountain to climb.

Douglas beat Gavin Ward with a lob following a mistake from Nicky Mohan but a covering defender was able to shepherd the ball to safety.

Right on the stroke of half time, David Oldfield missed a gilt-edged chance to settle the match but Davis redeemed himself with a fantastic low one-handed save to deny the ex-Hatter.

Within 60 seconds of the re-start Stephen Woods was lucky to stay on the pitch after his deliberate handball robbed Liam George of an open goal opportunity – but as a consolation Luton were at least awarded a penalty which Alexander planted in the corner with ease.

Five minutes later Luton had the ball in the net again after Ward dropped an Alexander free kick, but the referee somewhat harshly adjudged Phil Gray, who had impeded the keeper, in a crowded box.

Davis again had to be alert to deny Bill Robinson and Jason Kavanagh's low drives, but it was Luton who were pressing hardest – albeit without much punch.

As Hatters threw everything into attack in the dying minutes, Robinson should have made it 3-1 after popping up unmarked on the blindside, but lashed a wild shot wide.

Luton: Davis, Alexander, Thomas, Spring, White, (Willmott 78), Johnson, Harrison (McLaren 83), McKinnon, Douglas, Gray, George (Doherty 56), Att: 5,221. MoM: Harrison.

Kohler is back

DAVID Kohler is back behind his desk at Kenilworth Road after claiming that the club needed him back.

The Luton chairman insists he is still going to sell his controlling interest and leave as soon as he can, but said he needed to be at the helm to protect his investment.

He said: "I am still chairman of Luton Town until I can settle my business affairs and that means getting someone who is financially able, and willing, to take on the club.

"I had decided to stay away after announcing my intention to resign, but with no progress made on the sale front, I have taken the view that the club a ship without a rudder.

"Part of the problem of selling the club," said Kohler, "was that a minority of fans was making it difficult to find a buyer."



■ Kelvin Davis is beaten as Stoke score from the penalty spot



■ Liam George is brought down against Stoke City



■ David Oldfield stands firm in the Stoke City wall