



■ Tony Thorpe gets to grips with Jason Barnett



■ Matthew Spring puts in a midfield tackle



■ John Vaughan saves at the feet of Stuart Douglas Pictures by ANDY HANDLEY

The poor rob the poor as sad Hatters crash

HATTERS are back in the relegation mire after stumbling to defeat against the basement boys from Lincoln.

Thorpe managed to get on the score sheet but unfortunately it was Lincoln's Lee and not Luton's Tony.

With Sean Dyche returning to Bristol City, Gavin McGowan suspended for four games and a long list of injuries, Hatters could yet be playing in Division Three next season.

Visiting sides don't come much poorer than Lincoln - who hadn't notched a single goal in five away matches until yesterday - but Luton didn't force John Vaughan to make a single save.

And to compound the misery at Kenilworth Road the men from Robin Hood country snatched an ill deserved winner on the hour.

On this occasion the poor had robbed the poor.

**Luton Town 0
Lincoln City 1
By PETE KENYON**

Both Tony Battersby and John Finnigan looked yards offside when the ball was played down Luton's right flank but the flag never came and Battersby floated in a lovely cross which unmarked Lee Thorpe had time to pull down, before ramming home an unstoppable drive off the inside of the post.

The goal leaves Hatters just five points ahead of the relegation trap door with four matches still to play.

In a diabolical first-half Stuart Douglas' free header lacked sufficient power to trouble Vaughan, Thorpe had a pair of half chances, but apart from that there was little to get excited about - apart from the prospects of a half-time cuppa.

By way of reply it took Lincoln 41 minutes to muster their first effort on goal - a limp volley from Thorpe which dribbled harmlessly towards goal.

So dreadful was the first-half it was tempting to remain in the bar and watch a few frames of World Championship snooker rather than suffer 45 more minutes of tedium.

Hatters - fielding Emmerson Boyce for his debut, former conference player L'Andry Zahana-Oni, two loan players, ageing Marvin Johnson and team coach Mitchell Thomas and relative new boy Chris Willmott - were, quite frankly, a disorganised, dispirited, dysfunctional disgrace.

Lincoln were even worse, and on yesterday's showing both would have been roundly stuffed by a half-decent pub outfit.

To be fair, suspensions and injuries to senior players of the likes of Phil Gray, Ray McKinnon, Andrew Fotiadis and Gavin McGowan have forced Lawrence's hand and many of the youngsters, especially Chris Willmott, have bright futures ahead of them.

Whether that future is in Luton colours remains to be seen as Lawrence admitted after the match that he is coming under increasing

pressure from the receiver to sell.

After the break Luton did improve and had Tony Thorpe scored with a relatively simple chance on 48 minutes things might have turned out differently.

One of the games only flowing passing moves ended with Michael McIndoe firing in a cross which left Thorpe in acres of space, with only the 'keeper to beat and a three quarter empty net. But his header went miles wide of the target.

After Lincoln edged ahead Luton, predictably had more of the play without ever really looking like scoring.

Willmott's header went straight at Vaughan, Thorpe fired a weak shot when well placed and right at the death substitute Gary Doherty, back at Luton after his appearances in the World Youth Championship for Ireland, flashed a header wide of the upright.

After the match Lennie Lawrence could not hide his concern, he said: "They didn't try, it just wasn't in the tank. Thorpe had a good chance with

a header but he missed. If he'd scored we would not have lost but as I keep saying you can't afford to spend on chances like that when you create a few.

"There was no spark, but what other team would start a match with four 19-year-olds apart from us - Lincoln certainly wouldn't.

"Perhaps that is my fault in that I have got too many youngsters, but what other choice do I have?

"I bet there is not one club in all football divisions with fewer senior professionals in their squad than us, which is a very great worry for me.

"After today's result I am now nervously looking over my shoulder again and we have to scratch some results from somewhere."

Team: Davis, Willmott, Thomas, Spring, Dyche, Johnson, Thorpe, Zahana-Oni, (Doherty 45), Douglas, McIndoe, Boyce (Fraser 67).

Attendance: 5,122.

Man of the Match: Willmott.