



■ No score: Stuart Douglas and fans alike appeals to no avail as his goal attempt is ruled out for an infringement

Hatters off to a stuttering start

Notts County 0 Luton Town 0
By Bill Cole

Over fifteen hundred away supporters, full of emotion with the resolution of Luton Town's ownership issue, saw a battling performance from their team.

It was a pity that half a dozen of them tried to take on the Nottinghamshire Constabulary and were ejected from the ground late in the afternoon.

Given the circumstances the club has been in off the pitch all close season, the club should be pleased with the performance and the deserved point gained on the park.

They will meet much better sides than the Magpies who are woefully short of attacking ideas, but the Hatters made a start that they can build on now that David Kohler's regime is a thing of the past.

There was a lively start at Meadow Lane and had Paul McLaren's through ball been a fraction lower it would have been a sensational one.

As it was, the ball was hit at a Stuart Douglas's head, he could not bring it down quickly enough and the chance was gone.

The Town had the ball in the net in the tenth minute following a Matthew Spring free kick, but Darren Ward had clearly been illegally bundled over the line and the goal was duly disallowed.

Advantage

The ball was pumped up to the other end for former-Watford midfielder Craig Ramage, signed by County on Thursday from Bradford City, to head home but clearly from an offside position.

The Town were much the better footballing side throughout and from their third corner the ball fell to Julian Watts in front of goal, but it was whisked away before he could take advantage.

And Phil Gray almost surprised Ward with a 30-yard snap shot. Although it evaded his grasp Ward got his body



■ Fans celebrate: Survival was the most important issue this weekend

behind the ball and was able to safely grab the rebound.

In between time Tony Abbey was looking just a little hesitant when dealing with crosses, received a thump on the jaw as he caught one fired in from the left wing by Shaun Murray and dropped the ball as a result, but it was cleared easily enough.

Seventeen-year-old Matthew Taylor had a quiet debut and hardly got forward down the left all game, but he made a telling tackle on Liburd when his opposite number looked to get in across from the goal-line.

Taylor tried to repeat the tackle moments later but mis-timed it and was booked for bringing Liburd down.

Good work by Douglas proved a real threat to the home defence but just as he seemed certain to make it tell inside the goal area he was blocked out.

The Magpies came out with much more purpose after the break and almost immediately Mark Stallard missed their best chance of the match by blazing wide from a good position.

Gradually the Hatters pushed the home side back and from Phil Gray's long ball Douglas should have least have tested Ward.

But having left Redmile on the seat of his of his pants with a quick turn he moved the wrong way and Holmes raced across to clear.

Emmerson Bovce came on for Taylor

with 20 minutes to go and immediately looked sharp. He successfully took on virtually the whole County defence until finding himself on the edge of the box where his composure promptly left him.

It was anyone's game now and Abbey had to be quick off his line to hack clear before producing a couple of smart saves.

The strangest of them led to him tripping over the swirling cross from Clayton Blackmore that would have crept in under the bar.

Gray could have snatched all three points for the Town but as he was homing in on goal, he was clearly pushed by Mark Warren and went down in a heap inside the penalty area.

The referee Anthony Leake, fully forty yards behind play, did not feel able to award the spot kick.

So, after going the whole of last season without a goalless draw, the Hatters had to settle for one first time out this term. After the game, Julian Watts taken on loan from Bristol City yesterday and who put in a stunning performance in the middle of a resolute defence, said: "It was a point gained definitely rather than a couple lost, and got us off the mark which is the main thing."

Luton: Nathan Abbey, Matthew Taylor (Boyce 70), Marvin Johnson, Alan White, Julian Watts, Paul McLaren, Michael McIndoe, Matthew Spring, Stuart Douglas, Phil Gray. Attendance 6141