



BATTLER: Craig Ramage challenges Luton goalkeeper Abbey for the ball

MAGPIES RIGHT OFF THE MARK

NOTTS County endured a frustrating opening to the new season in a match played to the backdrop of crowd trouble. The home side struggled to break down visitors Luton Town and striker Mark Stallard wasted the best chance shortly after half-time.

But unfortunately most of the real action was in the away end where fighting broke out among Luton supporters on several occasions.

The cash-strapped Bedford club, in receivership and heavily in debt, were still under a Football League suspension until yesterday.

The game started in lively fashion, with both sides getting the ball forward quickly and putting defenders under pressure.

Notts were the first to show, Holmes hitting the ball over the top to Stallard, who broke through but was deemed to have fouled Johnson.

On ten minutes Luton midfielder Spring pumped a 50-yard free kick into the box where Ward caught the ball but was pushed into the net in doing so.

Unsurprisingly, the referee disallowed the goal just as



**Nationwide
Division Two**

OLIVER KAY
at Meadow Lane

he did a minute later, when Notts thought they had taken the lead.

Blackmore showed his quality by finding Stallard, whose lay-off was crossed from the left by Murray. Ramage rose highest and headed in, seemingly marking his debut with an excellent goal, but offside was given.

Richardson slashed over the bar from 25 yards, as Blackmore had done earlier, but then Warren had to react smartly as Douglas threatened to break through.

Douglas, a lively striker, then incurred the wrath of the home crowd by being fouled by Blackmore, who became the first Notts player to be booked in 1999-2000.

Luton keeper Abbey offered signs of encouragement for Notts, looking extremely shaky under crosses from Murray and Liburd, but it was the visitors who looked more threatening as the half round to a close.

Gray fluffed one shot from 25 yards but then tested Ward with a low shot from similar range a minute later.

Some crowd trouble broke out behind the goal with Luton fans seemingly squabbling among themselves. Apart from that unsightly incident their fans were a credit to the financially troubled club, turning up in their hundreds and making an awful lot of noise.

Their orange away kit might be nauseating but it did add colour to Meadow Lane, which was otherwise rather dull and subdued on the first day of the season.

Notts did threaten once in the closing minutes of the half when Liburd won a corner which Beadle almost headed in.

But Liburd was then booked for dissent on 39 minutes as he kicked the ball away needlessly.

The first big cheer of the season for Notts' fans came at half-time, when news of Forest's woes at Ipswich filtered through.

Notts began the second half fairly brightly with three chances in less than two minutes. Beadle had a close-range effort blocked and fell to Stallard who spurned the game's best chance so far. The angle was tight but he will have been disappointed at missing the target and not testing Abbey from six or seven yards.

Stallard's flicked header set up Beale but he was tackled as he bore down on goal.

On a couple of rare excursions Gray came close for Luton and then McIndoe nearly got on the end of a long throughball from White.

Otherwise it was a fairly comfortable first day as captain for Ward.

The problem was at the other end where Notts never really looked like scoring after that initial flurry.

To rectify this, Robson - a total outsider last season - was brought on for Liburd on 68 minutes and he was given a great ovation.

But then the visitors came close on a counter attack

Notts 0

Luton 0

Team news

NOTTS: Clayton Blackmore and Craig Ramage were handed their debuts, with youngster Richard Holmes coming in at right-back.

Mark Stallard shrugged off a thigh strain to partner Peter Beadle in attack and Duane Darby was on the bench waiting for his first senior match.

Gary Owers, Fran Tierney and Sean Farrell were injured and Dennis Pearce was suspended. Mark Robson was one of five substitutes and was hoping to impress after his disastrous 1998-99 season.

Substitutes: Hughes, Gibson, Bolland, Darby Robson

LUTON: Former Leicester and Sheffield Wednesday defender Julian Watts made his debut after signing on loan from Bristol City yesterday. He was the only new player that manager Lennie Lawrence managed to sign in time for the game. Nathan Abbey, who returned to the club after a spell in Belgium, played in goal, and 17-year-old Matt Taylor made his debut with another youngster Emerson Boyce on the bench.

Substitutes: George, Boyce, Scarlett, Zahani-oni Tate.



REFEREE: A Leake (Darwen) **ASSISTANT REFEREES:** S Proctor-Green, K Nind