



FLAT OUT: Hatters' fans screamed for a penalty when Phil Gray was sent flying in this 82nd minute attack at County but referee Leake turned down the appeal.

Drama and kids' stuff!



SO NEAR: Phil Gray fires in a shot during Saturday's showdown at Meadow Lane.



NO GOAL: County keeper Darren Ward won a free-kick here after being bundled over.

TWENTY-four hours can be a long time in football.

At 3pm on Friday Luton Town were fighting for survival, the Football League still to be convinced that the club could put together a package which would see them through the new season.

Then, at 3pm the following day, there was a match to be played, the drama of the previous 24 hours and the midnight settlement behind them at last.

And, to their credit, Luton performed bravely in a game which had precious little creativity and few chances. No matter. This was never going to be a game for the purists.

As far as Hatters were concerned it was a case of going out there, doing the business and showing the football world that Luton Town were still around.

Said manager Lennie Lawrence: "It was a good day for us. The players were up for it and they played with a lot of passion.

"They showed plenty of blood and guts and they did the business. We defended well, dealt with their crosses and created a couple of chances of our own.

"Considering what has been going on in the last couple of days, the players did very well."

The players? There were so many youngsters in the Luton squad at Meadow Lane, Hatters might have been accused of baby snatching.

Matthew Taylor, the exciting wing-back, made his debut at the age of 17 and full-back partner Stuart Fraser also looked as if he had only just started shaving. He's 19.

The Luton midfield was made up of Matthew Spring (19), Michael McIndoe (19) and the "veteran" Paul McLaren, who is 22.

Up front, the attack was led by Stuart Douglas, who seems to have been around for a long time but is still only 21.

Goalkeeper Nathan Abbey is just 21 and in the centre of Luton's defence Alan White stood tall at the age of 23.

On the bench Hatters had Liam George (20), Emmerson Boyce (19), Andre Scarlett (19), Landry Zahana-Oni (22) and goalkeeper Daniel Tate (17).

There was some experience, of course. Skipper Marvin Johnson looked solid at Meadow Lane and, alongside him, loan player Julian Watts made an impressive debut.

Up front Phil Gray worked hard alongside Douglas and may yet have a few important goals in him.

But Luton's future, assured

match facts

NOTTS COUNTY 0 LUTON 0

● **NOTTS COUNTY:** Darren Ward, Richard Holmes, Clayton Blackmore, Craig Ramage, Mark Warren, Matt Redmile (Paul Bolland, 86 mins), Richard Liburd (Mark Robson, 58), Ian Richardson, Peter Beadle, Mark Stallard (Duane Darby 80), Shaun Murray.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Stuart Fraser, Matthew Taylor (Emmerson Boyce, 69 mins), Julian Watts, Alan White, Marvin Johnson, Phil Gray, Paul McLaren, Stuart Douglas, Matthew Spring, Michael McIndoe. Other subs: George, Scarlett, Landry Zahana-Oni, Tate.

● **Shots on target:** Notts County 2, Luton 1.

● **Off target:** Notts County 4, Luton 8.

● **Corners:** Notts County 6, Luton 8.

● **Attendance:** 6,141. Referee: A Leake (Darwen).

● **Top Hatter:** Watts – confident in defence.

Lennie's babes do the business

for at least another season, lies at the feet of their youngsters.

Said Lawrence: "I want to make one or two more signings but I am not going to bother Cliff Bassett at the moment after the weekend he has had.

"Matthew Taylor did very well before he got a knock on the ankle and Stuart Douglas led the line well. He was busy and aggressive."

Lawrence was also pleased with Watts, who is on loan for a month from Bristol City.

He said: "He looked nice and solid and was good in the air."

Watts was the pick of the Luton side and played a major part in protecting the shaky Abbey.

Three times in the first-half Abbey was troubled by crosses as County sensed a weakness in the Luton keeper's armoury.

On one such occasion, in the 11th minute, Craig Ramage did head the ball in, only to be ruled offside.

A minute earlier Luton had netted following a Matthew Spring free-kick, but County keeper Darren Ward had been unfairly bundled over the line and the effort was disallowed.

There was little else to report in the first-half but County might have taken the lead soon after when Mark Stallard fired wide from 10 yards.

At the other end McLaren chipped just over the bar for Luton and four minutes later Douglas burst through, only to lose control at the vital moment.

Emmerson Boyce, who came on for Taylor, produced a superb solo run to threaten the County goal and, after a couple of timely saves by Abbey at the other end, Luton had appeals for a penalty turned down.

The incident came in the 82nd minute when Gray was pushed by Mark Warren. Lawrence said later: "I don't think it was a penalty. It would have been a very harsh decision."

Lennie's verdict

It was a good day for us. The players were up for it and they played with a lot of passion. They showed plenty of blood and guts and did the business. Considering what has been going on in the last couple of days they did very well.

