

Luton handed points by golden Gray's late strike

99/00

By Mike Berry

Luton 1
Cardiff 0

TWO sides protecting unbeaten starts to the season treated Kenilworth Road to a gold-rush of goalmouth activity, yet it was not until nine minutes from time that Phil Gray, a wise old prospector amid Luton's tenderfoots, poached a jewel of a winner.

Until that moment the game was shaping up as a rich endorsement of the goalkeeper's union. Cardiff's Jon Hallworth, with the plaudits of three penalty saves in the midweek Worthington Cup shoot-out at Queens Park Rangers still ringing in his ears, certainly did not deserve to finish empty-handed.

Hallworth, 33, rescued Cardiff on at least three occasions, the pick of his saves a point-blank parry from Gray's header on the hour. But he was powerless to prevent the Northern Ireland international's deserved decider, a sweet left-foot volley despatched into the bottom corner from Liam George's cross.

Cardiff, shorn of their first-choice midfield, appear to have unearthed their own gem in Winston Faerber, a polished wing-back signed in the summer from Den Haag, though he dragged a decent opening wide when home goalkeeper Nathan Abbey was found wanting from one of Andrew Legg's menacing long throws.

Abbey, 21, who left Luton in the summer for an ill-fated move into Belgian football, is back at Kenilworth Road on trial after the £800,000 sale of Kelvin Davis to Wimbledon. He had plenty to prove after conceding seven goals in the previous four games, but a clean sheet

was a step in the right direction, even though it needed the unwitting intervention of Stuart Fraser's back to deflect Craig Middleton's close-range effort clear of the crossbar.

Lennie Lawrence, the Luton manager, declared himself satisfied with his goalkeeper. "I'm not looking for reasons to get rid of Nathan," he said, "I'm looking for reasons to keep him. He's encouraging me bit by bit."

Roger Fumandiz's relaxed refereeing allowed an entertaining affair to flow, though at times his easy-going attitude was indiscriminate to the point of almost deserting his duty. On more than one occasion, he allowed the game to continue with players left

floored by blatant transgressions, and Swansea even had penalty claims waved aside when the tricky Jason Bowen was felled by Gary Doherty.

Things were not quite so laid-back off the pitch, with police deployed at half-time to subdue some festering friction in the stands. Luton fans had provoked Cardiff's away following by burning a Welsh flag, and the tiresome posturing that followed marred what was otherwise a terrific advertisement for the Nationwide League.

Luton Town: Abbey; Fraser, Doherty, Watts, Johnson, Taylor; Spring, McLaren (McIndoe 82); George (McKinnon 84); Gray, Fotiadis (Douglas 67). **Subs:** Sodge, Tate (g). **Goal:** Gray (81).

Cardiff City: Hallworth; Faerber (Phillips 75), Eckhardt, Young, Ford, Brazier; Fowler (Middleton 27), Cornforth (Carpenter 71), Legg; Bowen, Nugent. **Subs:** Hughes, Kelly (g).

Referee: R Fumandiz (Doncaster).