

Barlow strike keeps Latics on Rovers' tail

Wigan move up to second but Benson admits 'We're lucky'

WIGAN	1
LUTON	0

WIGAN'S in-form striker Stuart Barlow fired in his 10th goal of the season to put the title favourites right on the heels of leaders Bristol Rovers with a game in hand.

The ex-Everton striker pounced with 14 minutes left to beat Luton goalkeeper Nathan Abbey from close range after Ian Kilford had headed down a Darren Sheridan cross.

But unbeaten Wigan made heavy weather of the victory and were tactically frustrated by a well-organised Luton side.

Barlow's breakthrough goal was greeted with huge relief by the anxious Wigan fans, after the visitors' offside trap and the agility of Abbey had looked like earning the Hatters a point.

Abbey pulled off two brilliant first-half saves in quick succession to deny Kevin Sharp and Stuart Balmer.

Luton could have taken the lead six minutes before the break, but Gary Doherty's goal from a Matthew Taylor free-kick was controversially ruled out for offside.

Wigan's lack of width meant that their potent strike force of Barlow, Simon Haworth and Andy Liddell were never given the right service.

Luton forced three corners in a late bid to rescue the game, but Abbey was on hand to save superbly from Haworth's deflected shot.

Hatters boss Lennie Lawrence said: "We are disappointed with the result but not with the performance."

Wigan manager John Benson felt his team were maybe a little fortunate to take all three points. "I thought a draw would have been a fair result," he said. "Luton were far the better side in the first half. They are a good side with some excellent players."

Luton midfielder Matthew Spring was their driving force as the visitors edged the midfield battle. Wigan's man-of-the-match was Arjan de Zeeuw.

Wigan: Carroll, Bradshaw, Sharp, Balmer, De Zeeuw, Kilford, O'Neill, Sheridan, Haworth, Liddell, Barlow. Subs: Martinez, Griffiths, Lee, Jones, Stillie.

Luton: Abbey, Fraser, Taylor, Spring, Doherty, Watts, Johnson, Locke, McLaren, Douglas, George. Subs: Sodje, McIndoe, White, Midgley, Ward.

Referee: M Pike (Barrow-in-Furness).



UNBRIDLED JOY: Wigan's Stuart Barlow celebrates his tenth goal of the season