

Allott's last-gasp winner shatters unhappy Hatters

LUTON slumped to their fourth successive away league defeat in injury-time at Oldham.

The Hatters lost 2-1 with Mark Allott heading a late winner after sub Neil Midgley looked to have grabbed a point for the visitors four minutes earlier.

Teenager Stuart Fraser was the chief culprit, needlessly hacking down Mark Hotte in a dangerous position with the clock ticking away.

Fraser received a yellow card for his rashness but worse punishment was to follow as John Sheridan's cultured right foot delivered a perfectly-flighted free kick to the far post where Allott escaped the attentions of marker Matthew Taylor to head home.

Oldham, bottom of the table before this game, took the lead in controversial circumstances.

The Hatters defence confidently stepped forward on 66 minutes, expecting an offside flag, as Allott played a through ball for David McNiven to chase.

But wing-back Taylor, hand raised and on the other side of the pitch, was not in line with his teammates although he still appeared to be far enough up the field to catch McNiven offside.

To the visitors' dismay, the flag stayed down and McNiven rounded the onrushing Nathan Abbey and shot into an empty net despite Taylor's valiant efforts to make a recovery tackle.

The goal was the home side's reward for a rousing response to a half-time roasting from their manager Andy Ritchie.

Oldham, sponsored by Slumberland this season, looked asleep for most of the first-half but woke up with a start after Ritchie's vociferous, verbal volley.

Luton failed to take advantage of their early dominance.

In front of admirers, including Peter Reid, Brian Kidd, Paul Bracewell and Paul Jewell, 17-year-old boy wonder Taylor cracked two left-footed shots against a home post in the first half-hour - one a thunderous 25-yard free-kick.

Matthew Spring was also prominent early on and his surging run should have seen Phil

HATTERS boss Lennie Lawrence has quashed rumours that Wimbledon are preparing a bid for midfield star Matthew Spring. Stories appeared in several national newspapers over the weekend but Lawrence said: "I don't know anything about it. We have received no offer and no approach has been made."

Gray open the scoring on eight minutes, but the 31-year-old striker shot over.

Stuart Douglas wasted another chance and Oldham, playing with little confidence, less ideas and no firepower, went into the interval on level terms.

Ritchie's rocket and Gray hobbling off minutes into the second-half saw the game swing dramatically in Oldham's favour.

Gray had led the line well, but his withdrawal, coupled with that

match facts

OLDHAM ATH 2 LUTON TOWN 1

● **OLDHAM:** Gary Kelly, Scott McNiven, Andrew White, Stuart Thom (Mark Hotte, 88), Lee Duxbury, Paul Rickers, John Sheridan, Mark Allott, David McNiven, Neil Adams, Richard Graham.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Stuart Fraser, Matthew Taylor, Matthew Spring, Efetobore Sodie, Julian Watts, Marvin Johnson, Phil Gray (Tresor Kandol, 88), Paul McLaren (Michael McIndoe, 67), Stuart Douglas (Neil Midgley, 67), Adam Locke. Subs not used: Adam White, Scott Ward.

● **Shots on target:** Oldham 7, Luton 3.

● **Off target:** Oldham 6, Luton 5.

● **Corners:** Oldham 9, Luton 3.

● **Attendance:** 4,532.

● **Referee:** Mark Cowburn (Blackpool).

● **Top Hatter:** Matthew Spring - excellent first-half

of Paul McLaren later, saw Hatters dissolve into a organised rabble with little to their play.

Allott hit the post and three saves from Abbey kept McNiven's goal, as Luton played out their worst half of the season.

The visitors were unexpected thrown a lifeline on 86 minutes when home keeper Kelly let the ball straight to Adam Locke.

He fed Midgley who kept head to round the Oldham one and shoot into an empty net.

Kelly's clanger was compounded by his efforts to redeem himself.

He clattered into Taylor Stuart Thom as he raced to meet Midgley and the defender stretched off with a suspended collar bone.

Midgley's goal was Luton's in 360 minutes of league football, but counted for nothing when Allott pounced 360 seconds later.

Lennie Lawrence's verdict

"We took a second-half battering, the biggest since we went into receivership. The first goal was maybe offside but I'm not getting into that. We didn't defend it well enough. Neil's composure for the goal was the only good thing in the second-half but we shot ourselves in the foot again. It was a reckless challenge and you don't deserve anything when you allow Oldham a free header in the six-yard box."

