

Billy Mercer—Emerged with much credit after a commanding show mixed with some excellent stops **5**

Gerard Lavin—Less of a forward threat than usual and didn't close down the dangerous Taylor **4**

Keith Millen—A careless start made him a little edgy in the face of a quick frontline **4**

Shaun Taylor—Caught for pace at times, he's had better games for City **4**

Mickey Bell—STAR MAN **7**

Tommy Black—Did his best to bring life to City's forward line with another busy display **6**

Carl Hutchings—Runs took him into some promising areas but impact somewhat limited **4**

Paul Mortimer—Best intentions were sometimes undone by lost possession but still some good touches **5**

Brian Tinnion—Usual strong link with Bell and covered the ground to keep City on top **5**

Peter Beadle—Went close a couple of times but saw too little of the ball to make real impact **4**

Steve Torpey—A frustrating afternoon for the striker kept quiet by Luton's three-man defence **4**

Ratings are compiled on the assumption that a professional footballer earning his money is worth a five. The marks are a reflection of the opinion of our reporter at the match

Substitutions

Ivan Tistimetanu (for Hutchings, 46 mins) **5**
Scott Murray (for Lavin, 46 mins) **6**
Tony Thorpe (for Torpey, 64 mins) **4**
Not used: Paul Holland, Steve Phillips

Star Man

Mickey Bell—City's strongest threat with dangerous rampages and supply from the left



Opposition file

Luton (5-3-2)

Nathan Abbey	3
Matthew Taylor	7
Marvin Johnson	6
Julian Watts	6
Gary Doherty	6
Emerson Boyce	5
Matthew Spring	5
Alan White	5
Adam Locke	5
Stuart Douglas	5
Phil Gray	5

Substitutions

Andrew Fotiadis (for Douglas, 83 mins)
Not used: Liam George, Stuart Fraser, Andre Scarlett, Daniel Tate

Division Two

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	23	14	9	0	45	19	51
Preston	23	14	7	2	38	19	49
Bristol Rovers	23	14	5	4	31	15	47
Millwall	24	13	6	5	38	25	45
Burnley	23	12	7	4	33	19	43
Gillingham	22	12	5	5	40	26	41
Notts County	24	11	6	7	35	26	39
Stoke	23	10	8	5	33	21	38
Brentford	24	10	7	7	36	32	37
Bournemouth	24	10	4	10	35	35	34
Bury	22	7	9	6	35	29	30
Luton	23	8	6	9	26	31	30
Wycombe	23	7	8	8	27	30	29
CITY	23	5	11	7	27	29	26
Oldham	23	6	7	10	24	29	25
Oxford Utd	23	6	6	11	22	31	24
Scunthorpe	23	6	6	11	23	36	24
Cardiff	23	5	8	10	24	30	23
Wrexham	23	4	10	9	21	35	22
Colchester	23	5	6	12	26	46	21
Reading	22	4	7	11	25	40	19
Camb Utd	23	3	7	13	30	40	16
Blackpool	23	3	7	13	22	41	16
Chesterfield	22	2	8	12	13	25	14



All Arms and legs: Carl Hutchings tussles with Matthew Taylor with the ball there for the taking

City draw no comfort as strikers fire blanks

ALL Tony Pulis needs to solve City's goalscoring problems is a £20 million New Year bonus.

It worked for Sir Alex Ferguson when he found teams visiting Old Trafford and building a human wall at the back to frustrate and fragment.

As Pulis has discovered in reading Fergie's autobiography, a solution was found with two players called Yorke and Cole, the sort of luxury items that didn't pop out of City's stocking this Christmas.

So they are still searching for the key to unlock opposing defences who have eked out an incredible nine draws at Ashton Gate alone so far this season. It says everything that Pulis' team share with Wigan an unbeaten home record and yet the Second Division pacesetters have nine wins to their three.

It was highly appropriate, if no less agonising for fans and players alike, that the curtain should come down on a year of ultimate failure with another performance of under-achievement.

Yes, City had the best of it and played some good football at times but when the telling questions were asked, a deafening silence came back.

Peter Beadle and Steve Torpey did little to boost their chances of a long-term partnership with a lacklustre performance and when the latter made way, the returning Tony Thorpe, who had just 48

hours earlier ended a loan at Luton, fared no better.

Once again, the left side was the best source of chances and Brian Tinnion and Mickey Bell combined well in the 28th minute to set up City's best chance for Beadle.

The striker's header beat keeper Nathan Abbey but Julian Watts who, with Adam Locke, was one of two ex-City players in the visitors' line-up, cleared off the line.

Luton, without a League win in seven games, are far from the best this level can offer but could justifiably claim their first away point in two months and could have made more.

Eighteen-year-old left wing back Matthew Taylor provided welcome quality in an opening period that had very much a post-Christmas feel.

The home defence were sluggish at times and allowed Taylor space and time to sharpen his shooting boots from outside the box.

After first firing wide, Billy Mercer had to tip over a fierce drive before the youngster beat the keeper only to see his 25-yard effort come back off the foot of the post.

Luton should have been ahead after just six minutes when Keith Millen was guilty of losing the ball and leaving his team exposed at the back. Stuart Douglas found strike partner Phil Gray in space but Mercer saved a certain goal by rushing from his line and smothering the ball.

Abbey was far less assured, spilling the ball

almost every time he was tested which, given his vulnerability, should have been more frequently.

Torpey, Tinnion and Tommy Black put him under pressure but City were once again unable to find the all-important killer touch.

Pulis' frustration led to a double half-time substitution with Ivan Tistimetanu and Scott Murray replacing Carl Hutchings and Gerard Lavin and City did start the second period with more purpose.

Bell had already tried his luck from distance when Abbey had an obligatory spill from Tistimetanu's effort. Beadle pounced but, for once, the keeper did well to push his shot away.

The home pressure continued but Luton were dangerous on the break and, after Mercer had spectacularly denied Taylor and Gray again, Watts sent a far post header just wide and, after a late slip by Paul Mortimer, Andrew Fotiadis rounded Millen only to fire just wide.

Verdict

A fifth goalless home League draw brings a disappointing end to the year. City will need to be more creative to bring about a happier second half to the campaign.

Richard Payne

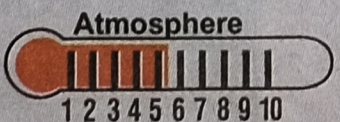


Match facts



8	SHOTS ON TARGET:	5
4	SHOTS OFF TARGET:	8
10	CORNERS:	4
13	FOULS CONCEDED:	11
5	OFFSIDES:	2

ATTENDANCE: 11,832



Bookings

BRISTOL CITY	LUTON TOWN
Taylor (foul, 13 mins), Lavin (foul, 40 mins)	None

Goals

None	None
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Fan's view

“We're playing better away at the moment but there's no-one to put the ball in the net, it's becoming a real problem. The first-half was better than the second, we just ran out of ideas. I didn't think our strikers did particularly well, unlike Billy Mercer who was strong.”

Guy Lewis, Olveston

Referee

MICHAEL RYAN (Preston) adequate