



■ Adam Locke and Peter Thorne battle to gain possession



■ Stuart Douglas, right, in the thick of the action against Stoke

# Unlucky Hatters fail to rescue the points

99/00

**THE Hatters came within four minutes of rescuing a point with a battling performance against the odds at the impressive Britannia Stadium yesterday.**

An eccentric performance from Chris Foy had sent Stoke City in at the break both a goal and a man to the good.

But a dubious penalty decision led to Matthew Spring's successful spot kick after 57 minutes and brought Luton right back into the game, despite having had Matthew Taylor controversially sent off just before the interval.

The young wing back, only just turned 18 years old, was racing through the middle with the ball when Mikael Hansson made a sliding tackle from behind and knocked the ball back to his goalkeeper.

Taylor's studs seemed accidentally to catch the City man, who went down as if pole-axed.

Referee Foy was well positioned to see the incident and immediately went to his pocket and

**Stoke City 2 Luton Town 1**

**Report by BILL COLE**

**Pictures by ANDY HANDLEY**

produced a red card. A stunned Taylor raised his arms in disbelief saying "What did I do?" to the Luton bench as he sloped off the pitch shaking his head.

All this after another poor decision from Mr Foy handed Stoke a 23rd-minute lead.

At least the goal gave the home section of the 10,016 crowd something to cheer.

Before that, both undermanned attacks had been stifled by blanket defences.

Stoke, stuffed with Scandinavians by their new manager Gudjon Thordarson, were playing at home with a single man up front.

I'm glad I don't watch my football in Iceland.

A long ball was headed by Peter Thorne over the Luton defence, but Marvin Johnson looked favourite to clear.

Paul Connor, however, handed off Johnson rugby-style, there was no whistle and Connor went on to thump the ball past a helpless Abbey.

Alan White had a chance to equalise five minutes later when Gavin Ward came way out of goal to punch Spring's cross clear, but White's attempt to lob home was woefully off target.

City stepped up the pace in an attempt to make their extra man pay dividends at the start of the second half and the Town defence lived dangerously for a while without the home side creating a really clear-cut chance.

Luton, however, weathered the storm and played their best football of the game before themselves benefitting from some strange decisions by Mr Foy.

First, Matthew Spring looked relieved not to be booked for a blatant body check on Hansson. Mr Foy gave the Hatters a throw-in instead.

When the ball was cleared downfield, a less than blatant push by Nicky Mahon on Phil Gray was enough to have the referee pointing to the penalty spot.

Matthew Spring, charged with converting the kick for the first time at senior level, side-footed firmly and confidently into the bottom left-hand corner to equalise.

The City crowd were looking to influence Mr Foy at every opportunity to award City something in return, but he proved impervious to their very vocal protests.

One home centre actually found a Town arm but Mr Foy was not to be swayed.

An increasingly desperate Stoke threw on all three substitutes in an effort to grab all three points and it was a man who has been a thorn in the Town's side in previous seasons who did the trick.

The Town had been defending City's constant long throw tactics very well but on 86 minutes one hurled in by Graham Kavanagh and aimed right at the near post was met by Kyle Lightbourne's flick header.

It beat Gary Doherty and Nathan Abbey, who went with Lightbourne to block, and trickled home from the narrowest of angles to deny Luton's valiant ten men in their battle against the odds.

**Luton: Abbey, Boyce, Taylor, Doherty, Watts, Johnson, Spring, Locke, White (George 87), Douglas (Fotiadius 70), Gray. Attendance: 10,016.**