



OUTNUMBERED: Cardiff City's Mark Bonner battles it out with three Luton Town players at Ninian Park

Pictures: ANDREW JAMES

Poor Bluebirds gift for birthday boy Burrows

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HAVING been told that job security and good results go hand in hand, this was not the way for Frank Burrows to spend his 56th birthday.

In a week when new money provoked feverish City speculation, Burrows rose on matchday to discover heavy bets had been placed on former Huddersfield Town manager Peter Jackson coming to Ninian Park.

Club chairman Steve Borley – who had spent the week successfully persuading the Football League to rubber-stamp a £2.5m investment and stressing that Burrows's fate depended on an upturn in City fortunes – denied yesterday that he had spoken to Jackson.

But bookmakers rarely get it wrong and the feeding frenzy over Burrows's future will only intensify should the sort of abject performance that handed Luton three points be repeated.

For his part, Burrows – who only signed a three-year contract last autumn after guiding City to promotion – remains committed to the Cardiff cause.

Resignation is not an option, at least for the time being.

"I want to see the job through here," said Burrows after a weekend that left Cardiff above the Second Division relegation zone by virtue only of goal difference.

"I want to keep us in this division and leave the club in a better state than when I found it. That's the same everywhere I've been. I've got enough to do without worrying about speculation.

PHIL BLANCHE

"If I was 36 and starting all over again I might be worried. But I've been a manager a long time and I don't concern myself with things I can't control."

Having signed a lengthy contract, Burrows would appear to be in a strong position should the new investors push the case for managerial change.

The Scot is understood to be on generous terms and, although some of the Ninian natives are restless, the majority of the fans still seem to be on his side.

And would the new backers wish to sacrifice a sizeable chunk of their investment to pay off Burrows when there is no guarantee a new manager will save them from the drop?

"I would have preferred to have seen out my two-year contract and made a decision in the summer," said Burrows.

"But the directors were keen for me to stay and, at that particular time, I was the bees knees. So, I tried to settle all the speculation by signing a new contract.

"I've not spoken to the chairman over whether there's money available for players. I don't know if there's any money until the (takeover) deal's done.

"I'm sure that if the investors come on board and want me here they'll want my ideas about keeping the club in this division. But it might never get to that."

Luton had only scored nine goals on their Football League travels this season, the second worst record in the



HIGH-FLYERS: Julian Watts of Luton and City's Kevin Nugent

division to Chesterfield.

But The Hatters took advantage of some hesitant goalkeeping by Jon Hallworth and dreadful defending to sour Burrows's birthday celebrations.

Hallworth, under increasing pressure for his place from 6ft 5in American newcomer Ian Feuer, set the downward spiral in motion when he flapped at Phil Gray's 22nd-minute cross.

He was rescued on that occasion but when Gray sent in another cross 30 sec-

onds later and Gary Doherty beat him for the second time there was the unattended Julian Watts to nod home from close range.

Richie Humphreys, who had gone close inside the first five minutes, tested Nathan Abbey after Mark Bonner had reached the by-line. But City lacked mid-field invention and had little pace to their attacks with Jason Bowen on the bench.

Luton, by contrast, were a constant threat on the counter as Gray, Liam George – who warmed Hallworth's hands with a stinging drive – and Stuart Douglas dovetailed to sparkling effect.

The lead was doubled in first-half stoppage time when Gray cushioned Emerson Boyce's cross into the path of Matthew Spring 18 yards out.

The Luton captain, one of eight players in the visiting ranks aged 22 or under, strode through a non-existent home defence and comfortably beat Hallworth with a neat sidefoot.

City did manage some concerted pressure after the restart but the game was effectively over by the 57th minute. Gray released the pacy George through an inviting gap for him to produce a carbon-copy of Spring's finish.

With most of the 6,185 crowd either long gone or drifting away, Bowen and Kevin Nugent interchanged passes in the final minute for the substitute to score.

For City, their next stop is fellow strugglers Scunthorpe – and a game that should reveal a lot more about the direction in which the club is heading.