

By **KEN GORMAN**

Cardiff 1 Luton 3

THE VULTURES are circling above Cardiff boss Frank Burrows after a defeat that pushed his team deeper into relegation trouble.

Cardiff have now collected just six points from the last 30 as Burrows reels from problems both on and off the field.

The new consortium pledged to invest £2.5 million into the club should be on board by the end of the week.

But there are already strong rumours that part of the deal is the appointment of a new manager — with former Huddersfield boss Peter Jackson a leading candidate.

The growing uncertainty could have been put onto the back-burner if Cardiff had given their fans a first victory of the new Millennium to celebrate yesterday.

Instead they finished well beaten by an impressive Luton side fielding eight players aged 22 or under.

Luton boss Lennie Lawrence, a past master at building success in the lower divisions, has assembled a team that plays with pace and punch — and has the irresistible force of Northern Ireland international Phil Gray to guide them.

Victory leaves Luton handily placed for a push at a promotion play-off spot, although they still have plenty of ground to make up.

For Cardiff the only target now is survival. It is only on goal difference that they are keeping their heads above the bottom four in Division Two.

Defied

Cardiff began brightly enough, with Richie Humphreys unlucky to see his clever chip drift wide as the Blue-birds displayed some neat and inventive football.

But Luton gradually eased their way into the game and forged ahead midway through the opening half as Cardiff's defence capitulated for the first time.

Jon Hallworth had defied Gray with a point-blank save a minute earlier. But the Cardiff goalkeeper was at fault for the goal as he was beaten to Gray's cross by Gary Doherty.

Doherty headed the ball back across goal where big Julian Watts was gifted a simple header to put the Hatters in front.

Humphreys went close to snatching a quick equaliser with a drive that Nathan Abbey in Luton's goal did well to hold. But by that stage the fragile confidence was already beginning to ebb away from Cardiff's play.

And Luton's quicksilver

WILLIE BOLAND leaps in ahead of Emerson Boyce, but it was the Hatters who came out on top



Frank living on Burrowed time

CARDIFF BOSS FEELS THE HEAT

attackers were a constant threat.

Hallworth was forced to make another desperate save from Gray, whose sharpness was causing real problems. Inevitably it was Gray who created Luton's second goal on the stroke of half-time.

Plight

This time his clever pass sent skipper Matthew Spring bursting through a non-existent defence to score with ease.

If Cardiff's half-time plight was desperate, it became impossible in the 57th minute when Luton plundered their third.

That man Gray was the provider again, this time using his head to nod back a half-clearance for Liam George to

gallop through and leave Hallworth helpless with a decisive finish.

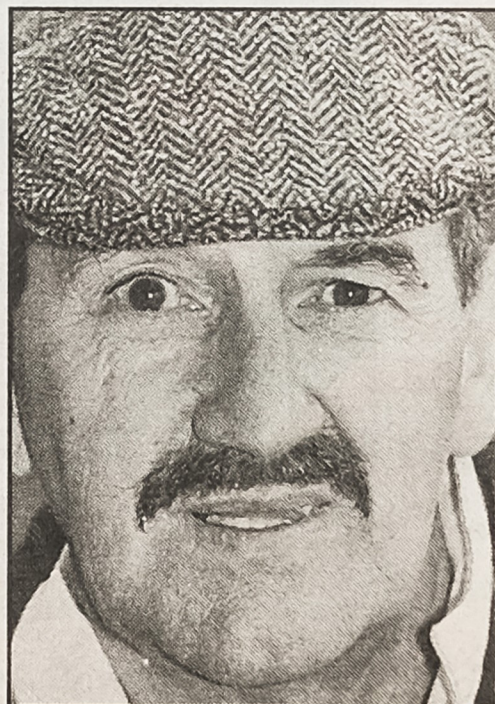
Cardiff responded to Burrows' touchline exhortations and continued to plough forward, but there was a growing inevitability about their fate.

Jason Bowen, brought on as sub after that sledgehammer third goal, did pull one back in the final minute.

But by that stage many of the 6,000 crowd had begun drifting their way home — even though Sunday lunch must have lost its edge for most of them.

CARDIFF: Hallworth, Perrett, Ford, Eckhardt (Faerber 58), Legg, Boland (Bower 58), Bonner, Carpenter, Low, Humphreys, Nugent.

LUTON: Abbey, Watts, Doherty, Fraser, Boyce, McGowan, Gray, Spring, Scarlett, Douglas (Fotiadis 78), George.



BURROWS is under pressure