

Three-mendous Hatters cure travel sickness

LUTON TOWN stayed on the play-off trail with a first league victory on their travels since October.

Goals from Julian Watts, Matthew Spring and Liam George sealed a 3-1 win at Cardiff City on Sunday.

A 1-0 victory at Oxford was the last time Lennie Lawrence's men had taken three away points but, on the evidence of this display, they should not have to wait as long for their next three.

The Hatters are currently hitting the back of the net for fun and Saturday's three-goal blast took their tally to 14 in five games during a goal-happy January. All three efforts were clinical finishes with the Cardiff defence mercilessly punished for minor mistakes.

Victory was also achieved in the absence of seven first team players, with sick captain Marvin Johnson joining the already unavailable Taylor, McLaren, Locke, White, Sodje and McIndoe. Stuart Fraser filled in for Johnson as the left-sided defender in a back three and looked comfortable throughout.

In fact, the Hatters defence, also boasting the unflappable Gary Doherty and dependable Watts, held firm until the final minute of the game when sub Jason Bowen grabbed a neat consolation.

Aside from that aberration, Lawrence and his defenders had clearly done their homework and coped admirably with the aerial bombardment provided by long-throw expert Andy Legg.

At the other end, Luton were ruthless in front of goal. Watts scored his second in as many games on 22 minutes when George tricked his marker on the left-wing and sent in an excellent cross that Doherty headed across goal.

A hesitant home defence was punished by Watts who headed into an unguarded net.

The Hatters doubled their advantage on the stroke of half-time when Spring collected Gray's clever lay-off and used his strength to muscle his way into the box and hold off home challenges before

CLIFF BASSETT will address Hatters fans at the Luton Town Supporters Club's 'An Evening with Cliff Bassett' tomorrow night. The Hatters owner and chairman will answer questions from supporters in Kenilworth Road's Eric Morecambe Suite from 7.30pm.

slotting past Jon Hallworth. Gray and George also stung the hands of Hallworth in the first-half as the visitors launched several devastating counter attacks.

Cardiff came closest to scoring when Richie Humphreys, on loan from Sheffield Wednesday, saw his clever lob drift over a stranded Nathan Abbey and wide.

Kevin Nugent was later thwarted by a fine low save from the Hatters keeper after a Gavin McGowan mistake. After the break, Lawrence withdrew Gray from the attack and into midfield to

defend his side's two-goal cushion. But even with the emphasis on attack reduced, the Hatters soon added a third from George, whose resurgence in form may prove vital if the play-off gap is to be bridged.

Luton capitalised fully when Russell Perrett made a hash of a routine headed clearance and Gray released George who raced clear and coolly sidefooted home his 13th goal of the season.

That goal came on 55 minutes and disgruntled home supporters were soon heading for the Ninian Park exit gates.

The threat of crowd trouble which had caused the game to be rescheduled, never materialised with Cardiff fans preferring to vent their anger towards their own side rather than the away end.

Those who left missed Bowen's late goal. The Welsh international tucked the ball under Abbey but it was an ill-deserved goal for a disjointed and sorry looking Cardiff side.

match facts

CARDIFF CITY 1 LUTON TOWN 3

● **CARDIFF:** Jon Hallworth, Andy Legg, Russell Perrett, Mike Ford, Willie Boland (Jason Bowen, 58), Mark Bonner, Kevin Nugent, Jeff Eckhardt (Winston Faerber, 58), Richard Carpenter, Richie Humphreys, Josh Low.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Emmerson Boyce, Gavin McGowan, Matthew Spring, Julian Watts, Gary Doherty, Stuart Fraser, Phil Gray, Stuart Douglas (Andrew Fotiadis, 78), Andre Scarlett, Liam George. Subs not used: Kandol, Ayres, Stirling, Tate.

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

● **Off target:** Cardiff 6, Luton 3.

● **Corners:** Cardiff 7, Luton 3.

● **Referee:** Chris Foy (St Helens).

● **Top Hatter:** George – menacing skill.

Lennie Lawrence's verdict

Considering there were five or six senior players unavailable it was an excellent performance. I was well pleased with them. We counter-attacked well and the problem of scoring away from home seems to be receding. It's just a pity we couldn't keep a clean sheet. Tanny deserved one because he was excellent in goal.

