

Hatters' Welsh woe



Lennie's verdict

In the first 30 minutes we had three or four clear-cut chances and other good situations which came to nothing. We defended poorly either side of half-time and got away with it until their goal. We had a lot of pressure late on but could not even get a decent contact on the ball never mind a strike on goal.

LENNIE LAWRENCE admitted that he had not felt so concerned for two-and-a-half years after watching his side slump to a fourth successive defeat.

Thirty months ago, Lawrence's job hung by a thread as his 1997-98 pre-season title favourites floundered in the relegation zone.

And after Saturday's result, the Hatters were closer to a bottom four place than a play-off spot, lying 12 points ahead of Oxford but 14 adrift of Stoke.

The last time Luton lost four consecutive games was last March when a 3-0 reverse at Chesterfield and the continued stalemate with David Kohler caused Cliff Bassett to call in the receivers.

On that bleak day at Saltergate, Lawrence bemoaned the lack of senior players available to him and, nearly a year on, he was echoing the same sentiments after Danny Allsopp's goal condemned the Hatters to a 1-0 defeat at Wrexham.

The depressed Luton boss said: "Never since receivership started has the lack of senior players been so savagely illustrated.

"In terms of performances on the field, I would have to go back two-and-a-half years to be as concerned as I am now.

"There is no spark and we've lost our collective togetherness."

match facts

● **WREXHAM:** Kevin Dearden, Mark McGregor, Phil Hardy, Brian Carey, Dave Ridler, Gareth Owen, Kevin Russell, Darren Ferguson, Robin Gibson, Karl Connolly, Danny Allsopp.

● **HATTERS:** Ben Roberts, Gavin McGowan (Matthew Taylor, 71), Stuart Fraser (Emmerson Boyce, 25), Gary Doherty, Julian Watts, Marvin Johnson, Adam Locke, Matthew Spring, Stuart Douglas,

WREXHAM 1 LUTON 0

Phil Gray, Andrew Fotiadis (Liam George, 59). Subs not used: Scott Ward, Andre Scarlett.

● **Shots on target:** Wrexham 9, Luton 3.

● **Off target:** Wrexham 4, Luton 8.

● **Corners:** Wrexham 8, Luton 5.

● **Referee:** David Laws (Whitley Bay).

● **Top Hatter:** Watts – dependable.

On a day when England's rugby players moved a step closer to Six Nations glory with a crushing victory over Wales, the Hatters missed out on a Grand Slam of their own.

The Kenilworth Road club had taken maximum points from their previous three matches against Welsh opposition this season but Wrexham restored some national pride with only their second home league win since September.

At Luton, the problems are mounting at both ends of the pitch. Defeat at the Racecourse Ground marked the Hatters' 11th consecutive game without a clean sheet and the 11th away game without a goal this season.

On-loan keeper Ben Roberts was partly to blame for Allsopp's match-winner and, at the other end, the visitors could only muster three shots on target.

After Saturday's game, Stuart Douglas

had not scored an away league goal since December 1998 and Phil Gray had only managed one all season. For all their qualities neither striker gets into goalscoring positions often enough.

The recalled Andrew Fotiadis does but he was strangely hauled off after just an hour of Saturday's game.

Fotiadis' pace and strength saw him go close twice early on but his finishing, perhaps because of a lack of first team action, let him down.

Energetic Emmerson Boyce, on as an early substitute for the injured Stuart Fraser, also squandered two excellent opportunities with wayward shooting.

In between, Gray sent a 30-yard lob inches over a stranded Kevin Dearden's crossbar and, later in the half, Matthew Spring drilled a firm drive into the Wrexham keeper's midriff and then flashed another effort just wide.

Wrexham's best chance before the break came on 43 minutes when Karl Connolly's downward header was kept out by Roberts.

The home side improved in the second-half and Allsopp, on loan from Manchester City, shot wide moments before his match-winning goal.

That came on 54 minutes when he was released by a clever reverse pass from Gareth Owen. Roberts came out to meet the Australian forward and left an enticing gap at the near post but Allsopp preferred to fire his effort in between the Hatters keeper's legs.

The visitors seemed to run out of ideas after that setback and it was ironic that Lawrence finished the game with the same set of players he said could not take the club forward just seven days earlier.

Only good saves from Roberts prevented Kevin Russell and Connolly from increasing the home side's lead.

At the other end, Watts sent a hopeful volley over from 25 yards and Matthew Taylor failed to test Dearden with a shot that was more a friendly back pass.

Luton could still have come away with a point if Douglas had not squandered an excellent 88th-minute chance.

The Hatters striker, without a goal in 10 games, sliced woefully into the away end with the goal at his mercy.

The unswerving loyalty of those fans is being severely tested.