

Goals galore but United slip again

COLCHESTER United have been involved in more than their share of goal-feasts this season. But another goal-bonanza counted for nothing at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

For the second successive match on-the-road, Steve Whitton's men kissed good-bye to a 2-1 lead. Just as had happened at Cardiff City a fortnight earlier, the U's let victory slip through their fingertips during the final 20 minutes. The



GIVE US A HUG: Steve McGavin celebrates his goal with fellow scorer Tony Lock

CARL MARSTON watches an exciting but ultimately frustrating match for Colchester at Kenilworth Road

Welshmen finished strongly to snatch a 3-2 win, and the Hatters did the same in the Bedfordshire drizzle. Yet Colchester could, and should, have won both matches. Those six extra points would have guaranteed the U's Division Two status for another season. As it is, although not yet sweating, they might soon be gently perspiring if such end-to-end thrillers continue to go against them. Defeats for Scunthorpe, Cardiff and Cambridge, and Blackpool's goalless draw with Preston, maintains a 10-point gap between Colchester and the bottom four. That could be sliced to seven this week, if both Cardiff and Cambridge win their matches in hand, at Gillingham and at home to Bury respectively. United supporters should not be unduly concerned. Attacking-wise, they have a team on a par with many of the best sides in the division. In fact, only three teams outside the top six have scored more goals than the U's (52) this season. Steve McGavin and Tony Lock were on target on Saturday. The worrying statistic is at the other end. Only basement club Chester City have leaked more goals in the top four divisions this campaign. A 10th minute opener from centre-half Julian Watts, and two strikes in the last 15 minutes from target man Gary Doherty and midfielder Matthew Taylor, increased United's goals against tally to 72 from 40 games. Defensive blips aside, the U's do not resemble relegation candidates, unlike before Christmas when Third Division football seemed a certainty for next year. Chesterfield look doomed, and if the U's can beat Blackpool at home next Saturday, then Steve McMahon's men will also be set for the drop. Cambridge, Cardiff and Oxford would then be involved in a variation of musical chairs – with three competitors and just one chair. Whitton will not rest until those five or six extra points are secured. They had a glorious chance to line their pockets in a topsy-turvy affair at Luton.

Trailing to a header from Watts, after his marker Jason Dozzell had misjudged a free kick delivered by Matthew Spring, the U's were lucky to still be in contention by half-time. Midfielder Gavin Johnson rattled a post before Watts' precise header, but the Hatters had otherwise dominated. Simon Brown had another impressive afternoon between the sticks. On 26 minutes, he arched back expertly to pluck Marvin Johnson's goalbound chip out of the air, and the U's keeper then palmed away Doherty's low drive with an acrobatic save. Brown was in the action again within seconds of the restart when pushing a powerful drive from Watts onto his near post.

But the U's staged a stirring comeback. Two goals inside seven minutes put them in the driving seat, and within sight of breaking the 50-point barrier. McGavin's 15th goal of the season was a real gem. He latched onto Lock's pass, curling a delightful shot into the top corner of the net from the edge of the box. Lock turned from provider to finisher on the hour-mark. He nipped in between keeper Ben Roberts and defender Alan White as the Hatters duo hesitated, slotting into a gaping net for his second goal in two matches. White, who had a spell on loan at Layer Road before the turn of the year, did not enjoy the best of afternoons

“We must learn to kill off sides” – Dozzell

JASON Dozzell, who has played at the highest level for Ipswich Town and Tottenham, is enjoying the latter part of his career at Colchester United. But the 32-year-old believes that the U's must become more ruthless to make progress as a Second Division outfit. “We have to learn to kill off teams,” rued Dozzell after Saturday's 3-2 defeat at Luton. “If we could do that, then we'd be a top six team. We should have beaten Luton, but it ended up being exactly the same story as our previous away match at Cardiff. “Again we conceded two late goals because of a loss of concentration in the last 15 minutes. “If we want to progress, then we need to win games like this. “I admit that it was my error that led to Luton's first goal. I should have done a lot better with the cross. It's not just the younger players who are losing concentration!” Dozzell started Saturday's game as a target man, but ended it in central midfield. Manager Steve Whitton certainly values this former England under-21 man for his experience and versatility. And Dozzell is quick to stress the dramatic advances that Colchester have already made this season. “Three months ago, we were doomed,” continued Dozzell. “Yet it's all credit to the manager and the players for turning it around.” Steve McGavin bagged his 15th goal of the season at Kenilworth Road with a quality finish. Yet he was adamant that Luton's late winner from Matthew Taylor should not have counted. McGavin said: “He looked miles offside from my point of view.” Whitton was critical of his team: “We didn't play that well. We looked good on the break, but that's not enough,” admitted the U's boss. “There was no defensive discipline, and in the end we deserved what we got. The basics lost us the game. The tackling was non-existent and our short passing was poor. We gave the ball away too easily. “At 2-1 up and with the home team struggling, we were running riot and looked like scoring another goal. But we then lost our shape. “We should expect to win when scoring two goals away from home. But we threw it away. “I'm fed up of watching thrillers. We should have closed up shop. “Yet I'm still confident that we will stay up.”

Luton Town			3
32 Roberts	6	SUBSTITUTES	
17 Boyce	8		
40 Watts	8	2 McGowan	
12 DOHERTY	8	(not used)	
6 M Johnson	6	10 McIndoe	
11 George	7	(not used)	
8 McLaren	7	18 Kandol	
4 Spring	7	(not used)	
7 Gray	6	21 Scarlett	
5 White	6	(not used)	
15 Taylor	7	1 Abbey	
		(not used)	
GOALS			
Watts (10 mins)			
Doherty (75 mins)			
Taylor (82 mins)			
BOOKINGS			
Taylor			(87, off-the-ball)
Match stats			
Corners 2			
Offsides 2			
Fouls conceded 8			
Shots on target 8			
Shots off target 7			
Formation: 3-4-3			
Weather: Mild, drizzle			

Colchester Utd			2
1 Brown	7	SUBSTITUTES	
3 Keith	7		
24 R Johnson	6	13 Walker	
11 Dozzell	6	(not used)	
8 Gregory	5	29 Arnott	
7 Duguid	7	63, for G Johnson)	
19 Lock	8	9 Moralee	
23 SKELTON	8	(not used)	
30 McGavin	8	6 Dunne	
4 G Johnson	8	(for Gregory 46)	6
10 Sodje	5	15 Lua Lua	
		(for Sodje, 77)	
GOALS			
McGavin(53 mins)			
Lock (60 mins)			
BOOKINGS			
Duguid			(45, foul)
Dunne			(82, dissent)
Lock (87,			off-the-ball)
Match stats			
Corners 6			
Offsides 6			
Fouls conceded 13			
Shots on target 5			
Shots off target 6			
Formation: 3-4-3			
Pitch: Well-watered			