

Hill warns his Luton flops: You face chop!

RICKY HILL threatened his players with the chop after a dismal 2-0 home defeat against Northampton Town.

The Hatters boss was left fuming after a desperate display that could have brought a much heavier defeat had it not been for the heroics of reserve keeper Nathan Abbey.

Abbey, dropped last season after a nightmare display against Bristol Rovers, was recalled after Mark Ovendale pulled out with a neck spasm an hour before kick-off.

He responded with his best performance at Kenilworth Road, turning the jeers into cheers as he won over a sceptical home crowd.

But the frustrated Hatters fans booed the rest of the side off the pitch and Hill also only had praise for Abbey after the game.

The Luton manager said: "Northampton played very well but too many of our players were well below par. If it had not been for Nathan we would be looking at a larger defeat.

"He pulled off a couple of great saves - one in the first minute - which shows how awfully we started. We try to educate the players throughout the week on doing the right and simple things.

"We cannot play with so much naivety. We were losing possession, trying the wrong things at the wrong times and generally showing a lack of footballing intelligence. I have not got time to wait for that to go away. We might have to get new players if these ones can't play at home.

"It's too late for sorries now from the players. Sorries don't mean anything. Actions speak louder than words. People come and say they are good at certain things and show us in training but that means nothing.

"It's got to be what can you do when you cross that white line. There will be changes until we find the right personnel who can play consistently."

In fact, after Saturday's defeat, the Hatters had won just one of their eight games this season.

Northampton's goals were scored by Jamie Forrester on 38 minutes and Steve Howard on the hour. The dejected home side never threatened a comeback, leaving their fans to endure a painful half-hour wait for the final whistle.

Ex-Leeds United striker Forrester tormented the Hatters all afternoon and forged a potent partnership with target man Howard.

Only a great close-range reflex save from Abbey prevented Forrester from getting on the scoresheet after just two minutes and the Hatters

matchfacts

LUTON 0 NORTH'TON 2

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Stuart Fraser, Julian Watts, Emmerson Boyce, Matthew Taylor, Andre Scarlett, Matthew Spring (Peter Holmes 55), Paul McLaren, Dean Brennan (Tresor Kandol, 61), Mark Stein, Liam George. Subs not used: Adam Locke, Jude Stirling, Friedrich Breitenfelder.

● **NORTHAMPTON:** Keith Welch, Ian Hendon, John Frain, Ian Sampson, Richard Dryden, James Hunt, Steve Howard, John Hodge (David Savage, 76), Chris Hargreaves, Jamie Forrester (Marco Gabbiadini, 76), Richard Green. Subs not used: Andrew Morrow, Garry Hughes, Adam Sollitt.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 4 N'ton 5.

● **Off target:** Luton 8 N'ton 5.

● **Corners:** Luton 3 N'ton 9.

● **Top Hatter:** Nathan Abbey - one-man show.



SAVES: Nathan Abbey.

were lucky not to concede a penalty soon afterwards when Matthew Taylor lunged clumsily at the Cobblers striker.

Emmerson Boyce then cleared off the line to thwart Forrester before the Northampton forward predictably broke the deadlock on 38 minutes.

Forrester controlled Howard's headed flick-on before turning and firing a low drive from 15 yards in off a post.

At the other end, Mark Stein and Liam George ploughed a lonely furrow against an uncompromising five-man Northampton defence.

The Hatters only real chance of the first-half saw Paul McLaren have a shot charged down by Cobblers keeper Keith Welch after Stein had missed his kick following good play from Dean Brennan and George.

After the break, Luton lost Matthew Spring,

struggling for both form and fitness, with a cut head and Stein missed a 56th-minute chance to level the scores before Forrester weaved his magic again.

The skillful striker teased McLaren on the by-line before pulling the ball back for Howard, who had time to turn and shoot powerfully into the roof of a helpless Abbey's net.

Forrester could have gone on to bag a hat-trick, tormenting Julian Watts and Stuart Fraser before curling an excellent effort inches wide and then being denied twice by alert goalkeeping from 22-year-old Abbey.

Northampton substituted Forrester on 76 minutes and his replacement Marco Gabbiadini teed up Howard for a last-minute chance that Abbey athletically saved.

Andre Scarlett, Taylor and Stein had half-chances in the second period to steal a home goal but all their efforts lacked conviction.

The 'Men against Boys' nature of the defeat will concern Hill, who used nine players aged 21 and under during Saturday's game.

Only Boyce and Julian Watts can take any pride from their displays in an otherwise depressing outfield performance.