



■ On and off the file dinterest: Liam George scores for the Hatters, while new director Graham Kelly, the former FA Secretary, looks on anxiously

Angry crowd turn on sorry Hatters

Luton Town 2 Swindon 3

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HATTERS boss Ricky Hill trudged off with jeers ringing in his ears as Luton slipped into the relegation zone.

Fans in the main stand yesterday restricted themselves to boos and chants of "What a load of rubbish" but too many more performances like this and the unthinkable cry of "Hill Out" is not too far off.

On the positive side, Hatters finally got over their collective amnesia of how to score – Mark Stein's 12th minute opener was their first goal in more than 400 minutes – but Keystone Cops' defending once again cost Hatters dear.

Nineteen goals conceded in 12 games is a statistic which speaks for itself.

Against lowly Swindon yesterday Hatters rarely looked like conceding but still managed to do so three times.

After Stein had got Luton off to the perfect start it should have been plain sailing.

But just before the half hour Julian Watts twice failed to clear his lines and David Duke was able to punish the home side with an 18 yard drive that bounced over the hand of the outstretched Ovendale.

Five minutes from the break ex-Hatter Martin Williams scored with a spectacular flying volley – but once again everyone seemed to be waiting for someone else to make a challenge.

That strike was cancelled out two minutes later as Stein's pass found Liam George bursting through a square back line, and the Irishman made no mistake as Bart Griemink tried to narrow the angle.

But after that Hatters just fell apart. Simple passes went astray, throw-ins failed to find their target and a flurry of corners ended up going straight down Griemink's throat.

The sad fact of the matter is that Hatters look like a relegation bound team and the season is barely underway.

Just what new director Graham Kelly made of it who knows?

Matthew Taylor and Matthew Spring – who burst into the first team and put in a string of fine performances last season now look park footballers.

Julian Watts – a rock at the heart of



■ You beauty: Tresor Kandol congratulates Hatters scorer Mark Stein

Hatter's defence last year – is making costly mistakes, and Mark Stein looks like a player who is approaching his sell-by date.

Liam George shows flashes of inspiration – but if only someone would tell him that a ball in the net is worth three in the stands.

Time and again the talented youngster gets himself into good positions only to lose out because he fails to take the simple option in favour of the spectacular.

Two minutes after the break George had the ball at his feet at the edge of the box with the 'keeper stranded but instead of bringing the ball under control and tucking it past a covering defender on the line he opted instead for a flashy first time chip which predictably enough ended up sailing

high and wide.

But that was Hatters' only real chance of a dire second half and on 66 minutes Williams netted his second and the Robins winner.

Keith O'Halloran curled a free kick into the box and Williams rose above Watts to plant a firm header past Ovendale.

Hill responded by withdrawing Spring and Kandol but subs Peter Thomson and Adam Locke failed to raise Hatters above the diabolical and Swindon held out easily to drag themselves out of the drop zone.

Team: Ovendale, Boyce, Watts, George, Fraser, Taylor, Spring (Locke 66), Holmes, Kandol (Thomson 72), Stein, Scarlett.

Attendance: 4,933.

Man of the match: George.

Latvian virus hits players

A VIRUS infection, brought back from Latvia by Stuart Fraser, is sweeping through Kenilworth Road.

Luton had to go to Sunderland without Adam Locke and acting skipper Paul McLaren became the latest victim when he reported sick on Friday morning.

Manager Ricky Hill said: "Stuart went to Riga with the Scottish under 21s and came back feeling it. He said he was all right, but he wasn't his normal self against Northampton, giving the ball away more often than he has done all season.

"Adam came in on Thursday, but he looked drained and he seems to have lost a lot of weight. Now Paul has gone down with it."

"Tresor Kandol's problems (see page 5) were before my time here and I don't know his current situation, but since I have been here he has been first class.

"He has been bright about the place and came out of the pack to be rewarded with a couple of starts. He has let no-one down."

As a result of this week's development in his private life though, the Town boss may find that he has to do without his services for some weeks later in the year.

Hill's injury troubles have not improved worse either, with Stuart Douglas and Marvin Johnson having had MRI scans on hamstrings that are reluctant to heal.

"Marvin says that his scan showed up scar tissue and fluid from a tear in the muscle that has healed, and Stuart also seems to have had a small tear," said Hill.

Andrew Fotiadis has still to start training with the squad, so he is some time away from returning to the first team.

"Gavin McGowan played in the reserves in the week and worked very hard. He is sore

generally through lack of match practice," said Hill.

"His injured ankle is all right, but he needs more games under his belt before he can be considered for the first team."

Hill knows the team is lacking in front of goal. He said: "We have had problems scoring. We don't get our noses in front often enough and when we do, we don't seem been able to move the score on from that.

"We have been concentrating on our forward play since we came back from Sunderland."

Hill appreciates there is a lot of hard work to be done if Luton are to be successful. "I have been here just nine weeks and inherited a squad of 19, full of young players. My predecessor here said 'it's nice to be at a proper football club' when he took over at Grimsby after five years trying to turn this club around, so I don't think I can be criticised after nine weeks.

"We are trying to bring in experience and are leaving no stones unturned in our search for new players. But after the match on Tuesday, Peter Reid said he was looking for experienced men and Brian Horton rang me on Thursday saying the same thing, so around 70 clubs out of the 92 are looking for the same thing.

"We have to be optimistic about the second leg with Sunderland. We more than matched them for half the game up there and had a great chance in the very first minute. With a bit of luck we could score early at Luton, and anything could happen then with the crowd behind us."

The Hatters travel to Bristol Rovers on Saturday for a tricky league game. "They are all difficult now," said Hill.

"They have had a good start to the season despite selling both Jason Roberts and Jamie Cureton who scored so many goals for them last season."

BILL COLE