

Nightmare start is the worst in 103 years!

GAVIN MCGOWAN'S own goal sent the Hatters crashing to defeat against Millwall as Ricky Hill's men equalled the worst start to a season in the club's history.

Luton have now won just one of their first 15 matches which is a record only matched once in the 103 years since the club first tasted Football League action.

That run came in 1992/93 but included two games in the unfashionable Anglo Italian Cup. Hill can take some consolation, however, from the club's poor start to the campaign. In 92/93, the Hatters recovered to stave off relegation from Division One.

After Sunday's loss, the Hatters boss will be hoping he can reverse the club's fortunes and eliminate the threat of a return to football's basement division, which they last left in 1968.

Millwall have won their last five matches at Luton but, despite nine goals in their previous two matches, it took McGowan's intervention to secure all three points on Sunday.

The Hatters right-wing-back, making his first start of the season, smashed the ball into the roof of his own net on 83 minutes after Neil Harris had headed Christophe Kinet's centre across the face of Mark Ovendale's goal.

Until McGowan's intervention, Luton had looked good for a point after a below-par first-half performance.

Top scorer Harris was denied by Ovendale twice after twisting and turning inside Hatters defender Emmerson Boyce.

The lively striker also headed over from five yards out and his fellow forward Sam Parkin, on loan from Chelsea, side-footed wide at the end of a sweeping move.

Luton struggled to trouble Millwall keeper Tony Warner and only raised their tempo when the home crowd began their "Ricky Hill's Barmy Army" chant.

The vocal support, as against Sunderland, spurred the players on and led to three chances in nine minutes.

First, Adam Locke

should have opened the scoring on 57 minutes but his shot did not carry enough venom to beat Warner.

Five minutes later, McGowan blazed over from 10 yards out and then Matthew Taylor almost shinned an effort over the line after Warner had fumbled Tresor Kandol's deep cross, but ex-Hatters loan defender Sean Dyche cleared the danger.

At the other end, Millwall's Robbie Ryan forced a near-post save from Ovendale, but the visitors threatened little before McGowan's mistake.

The own goal was cruel on a Hatters defence that had shown more determination than in recent games, with centre-half Julian Watts back to his resilient best.

But further upfield,

goalscoring opportunities were once more at a premium at Kenilworth Road and the Hatters have now failed to score in five of their eight home matches this season.

Hill is still enjoying the backing of a home crowd that is desperate to see their former playing boss succeed despite the poor start.

The Hatters boss appreciates their patience, saying: "The supporters seem to be a little bit more sympathetic to my case because of my past."

"It's also early days in terms of who I have managed to bring in."

"But we can't feel sorry for ourselves and it's all about the team's temperament now."

"We need to work hard throughout 90 minutes in games and not just for one half."

matchfacts

LUTON 0 MILLWALL 1

● **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Paul McLaren, Julian Watts, Emmerson Boyce, Gavin McGowan, Matthew Spring, Adam Locke, Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Mark Stein, Tresor Kandol. Subs not used: Dean Brennan, Peter Holmes, John Stirling, Andre Scarlett, Nathan Abbey.

● **MILLWALL:** Tony Warner, Matt Lawrence, Stuart Nethercott, Sean Dyche, Robbie Ryan, Lucas Neil, Tim Cahill (Leke Odunsi, 88), Dave Livermore, Christophe Kinet, Neil Harris, Sam Parkin. Subs not used: David Tuttle, Paul Infill, Steven Reid, Willy Gueret.

● **Referee:** Alan Wiley.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 4 Millwall 7.

● **Off target:** Luton 5 Millwall 13.

● **Corners:** Luton 9 Millwall 13.

● **Star Man:** Julian Watts - defended valiantly at the heart of a three-man back-line.

Hill view

"I'm disappointed we lost the three points. I felt in the first period they were on top and unlucky not to go in one or two ahead. They put us under a lot of pressure. I thought we had weathered it and been the worst we could be. I asked the players to up the intensity at half-time and they did well without getting a clear sight on goal. We defended crosses much better but then a good ball in caught us all at sea and poor Gavin McGowan smashed it into the top corner."

