

# Spring off as Hatters slump

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**THE controversial sending-off of Matthew Spring piled more woe on the shoulders of Hatters boss Ricky Hill.**

Hatters move ever closer to the bottom of Division Two, after a promising performance at the Abbey Stadium was sabotaged by a debatable decision from the eccentric John Brandwood.

Hill took some time to emerge from the referee's room and seemed none the wiser why Spring had been red carded on the half hour mark with Hatters leading through a 13th minute Mark Stein goal.

Brandwood's version of events to Hill was that Spring had denied Cambridge taking a free kick – a second bookable offence.

"I pointed out there wasn't an amber shirt anywhere in the vicinity and that Spring was in the act of passing when the whistle blew," said Hill, who left with words of consolation from United boss Roy McFarland.

"We were the luckiest team around tonight," said the former England defender.

"Luton caused us all sorts of problems, their football was better than ours and the sending off gave us something when we were struggling.

"The only pleasing thing we can take out of the game is the three points."

**Cambridge Utd 2  
Luton Town 1**

Which is exactly what the Hatters would have liked and would probably have got but for the Spring dismissal.

As McFarland conceded, Luton were at the time totally in the driving seat.

Mr Brandwood is notorious for his quirky decisions and needless flourishing of cards. He cemented that reputation in this game.

Cambridge won with goals from Tom Youngs, gifted to him by goalkeeper Mark Ovendale, and Zeema Abbey, the former Hitchin striker, who tapped in 12 minutes from time.

It was all so different before the Spring controversy.

Stein's goal came following a corner, after Matthew Taylor's dangerous cross was headed over by Tom Cowan.

Spring's kick was headed back low beyond the far post by Julian Watts and a combination of Stein's touch and a woeful flap by Lionel Perez did the trick.

Mr Brandwood condemned Luton to play for the last hour with 10 men when Watts was adjudged to have fouled Jonas Axeldal just outside the Town penalty area.

The Swede made the most of it and when the referee interpreted Spring's action as illegal, the pressure was on.

On 54 minutes, United got on to level terms through an uncharacteristic error from Ovendale.

He had already failed to hold on

to a couple of shots, putting his defence under in trouble, when he made a complete mess of a long cross from former Hatter John Dreyer.

He was far too late in coming for it and Youngs simply looped a header over Ovendale as he belatedly advanced.

Ironically, United's winner came after a splendid parry from Ovendale. The rebound fell kindly to Abbey, brother of Luton's Nathan, to tuck in his fourth goal of the season..

The Hatters 10-men still managed to exert pressure on United and Hill thought they had a justifiable decision for a penalty turned down, after an apparent handball from Abbey.

"Zeema panicked under pressure from Taylor's challenge and handled. To my mind that's a penalty," said Hill.

After yesterday's games, only Oxford separate Hatters from the bottom of Division Two.

Oxford are on four points with Luton having three points more.

Hill is desperate to strengthen his squad and the position will be even more acute with Spring facing a suspension.

**Luton Town: Ovendale; McGowan (Brennan 89), Watts, McLaren, Boyce, Taylor, Spring, Locke, George, Kandol, Holmes), Stein.**

**Attendance: 6191**

**Town fans 1210**

**Luton man-of-the-match: Paul McLaren**



■ Above: A dejected Matthew Spring walks as referee John Brandwood waves the red card. Below: Early joy for the Hatters as Mark Stein puts them ahead

