



RANDALL BUTT
reports from the
Abbey Stadium

IT MIGHT have been unfashionable, but it would have been appropriate if the Cambridge United fans had adapted an old Bob Dylan song last night: "Will you stay forever Youngs."

The mercurial Mildenhall man, in the throws of contract talks with Roy McFarland, glittered like a diamond among the dross.

While most of his team-mates looked as though they were playing in Wellington boots, suffering again from their enforced break from League football, Youngs alone teased and tormented Luton's defenders.

And there were plenty of them after the 31st minute dismissal of playmaker Matthew Spring persuaded a Hatters side desperate for a scrap of success, to put everything first into the defence of their shock 14th minute lead, then into preserving a precious point.

But Youngs' pace and, more importantly, his extraordinary knack of timing his darting runs into the box to split-second perfection, ripped everything away from them.

He produced the equaliser — his sixth goal in five games — just when United needed it, nine minutes into the second half, pumping a little confidence back into a flat and disjointed team.

Goalkeeper Mark Ovendale made the mistake of thinking he could beat the striker to a well-flighted John Dreyer cross, but was left clutching air.

United were still unable to produce their best form against a young, anxious Hatters side struggling through their worst start in their 103-year history.

But with 11 minutes to go and the game apparently heading for an unsatisfactory draw after attracting the Abbey's biggest crowd of the season — more than 6,000 — Youngs combined brilliantly with skipper Paul Wanless to make a largely forgettable evening one which striker Zema Abbey will remember for the rest of his career.

The superb through ball from Wanless prised open a gap, Youngs darted through and coolly served up the ball on a plate for Abbey to end his shaky spell in front of goal by scoring the winner against his home town, and brother's team.

Most of the Premiership and first division scouts packed into the only League game in the country last night scurried away at that point, presumably grateful the trip had not been a total waste of time.

Youngs was the only player singled out for acclaim by McFarland, who summed up the general display in one word, "awful."

And it spoke volumes about the striker's contribution when Luton's under-pressure boss Ricky Hill, an attacker of no small repute in his playing days, found time, unprompted, to offer some praise when he could have been excused for being completely wrapped up in his own problems.

"The boy Youngs was outstanding," he said. "We had trouble with him all night. He has speed and skill. Apart from the referee, he decided the match."

Hill claimed Spring was harshly sent off by referee John Brandwood, an official high on the Abbey fans hate list after his appalling decision against Trevor Benjamin

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WHERE'S HE GONE? . . . Luton defender Matthew Taylor is turned by Tom Youngs scorer of United's Tom Youngs.
Picture: Gareth Fuller. 8878m.19

Diamond geezer Youngs shines through dross

in last season's FA Cup clash with Bolton Wanderers.

Brandwood stuck so firmly to the letter of the law in the first half he stifled what little flow there was in an error-strewn encounter.

Yet after flourishing four yellow cards and one red he failed to punish similar offences after the break, fortunately for United, who might have seen Abbey sent off and a penalty awarded for a handball incident if the official had continued to be as frostily fussy.

United never got into gear in that first period. Goalkeeper Lionel Perez made a rare blunder, gifting Luton their 14th-minute goal, and the general level of play was only marginally higher than that achieved by England in recent days.

Inevitably, it was Youngs who featured in the few upbeat moments, breaking through to be smothered by two defenders in the seventh minute, then colliding with team-mate Jonas Axeldal as they both went for the same cross from Abbey just before the half-time whistle.

Luton never really threatened a second goal, despite Mark Stein creating a little panic from time to time in a creaking defence manned by players only too aware of injury problems, with another match coming up on Tuesday.

But United hardly looked worthy winners until Neil Mustoe added some movement and variety when he went on as a 69th minute substitute.

Then we got glimpses of a team which has shocked the division by climbing into the promotion places.

Mustoe set up what should have been a third goal to reward the earlier patience of the supporters when he hoisted a perfect cross to Alex Russell just before the final whistle, but on a night when his considerable skills were muted, the midfielder, with time to bring the ball down, headed straight at the keeper.



THE ABBEY HABIT . . . is firing on target for United striker Zema Abbey, who scored the second goal.
Picture: Gareth Fuller. 8878m.24