

Second half tale of woe for Town

00/01

Luton Town 0
Bristol City 3

By Peter Kenyon

A HAT TRICK of second half blunders condemned Hatters to their sixth home defeat in nine league games.

Kenilworth Road may once have been a fortress but these days it is about as menacing to visitors as a ramshackled Portakabin.

The sad fact is that Luton put in a very decent first half performance, in which for the first time this season they mounted a period of sustained pressure, only to fall apart after Scott Murray put City in a scarcely deserved 54th minute lead.

Emmerson Boyce failed to clear a speculative cross into the box, Nathan Abbey could only parry Murray's weak first effort and even though Murray had the beating of the 'keeper at the second attempt Kent Karlsen should have cleared the poorly directed effort off the line.

Nine minutes later Simon Clist's cross from the right cleared Abbey at his near post and an unmarked Lee Peacock couldn't believe the amount of time and space he had at the far post to direct and beat his man and steer home off an upright.

And three minutes later Paul McClaren's dreadful pass, underhit when it only had to travel eight yards, allowed Murray to run the length of the right wing. His low cross flew to a collection of players at the near



■ A trio of Hatters, Stein, McGowan and Douglas fail to get on the end of this half chance with the City goalkeeper beaten

post and Micky Bell this time benefitted from having no marker to sweep home at the far post from ten yards.

As Hatters heads dropped the bugle player among a large contingent of travelling fans caught the mood perfectly with a rendition of the Last Post, normally reserved for military funerals but an appropriate reminder nonetheless of the death of football in recent times at Kenilworth Road.

It was all so different in a scintillating

first half in which new boy Petri Helin ran the midfield and Hatters looked to be firing on all cylinders.

In the fifth minute Stuart Douglas appeared to divert a goal bound Boyce header wide of an upright, and just before the half hour Steve Phillips had to be at his best to deny Douglas.

Seconds later a lovely link-up play in the City box between George and Stein let the Irishman in on goal but his effort lacked the power to beat Phillips from ten yards.

Stein then wasted a golden opportunity from 12 yards, blazing wide when he had the goal at his mercy, and it seemed only a matter of time before a rampant home side finally punished a City team which was unbeaten in the 11 games going into yesterday's match.

But when Douglas limped off just before the interval with what looked like a recurrence of his hamstring injury Hatters never looked the same side again.

It looks very ominous for manager Ricky Hill and he won't be comforted by chairman Mike Watson-Challis' words of warning in the match programme that 'the directors are very concerned about our results so far this season. Luton now sit five points adrift of safety and the margin could get greater as other sides at the bottom notched up valuable wins'.

Hatters: Abbey, Helin, Karlsen, McGowan, Boyce, Taylor, McClaren, Spring, George, Douglas, (Fotiadis 44), Stein (Baptiste 74)

Attendance: 6595

Man of the Match Helin.



■ Finnish ace Helin battles for the ball