

Wilson makes happy return

RICKY HILL was given the dreaded vote of confidence by chairman Mike Watson-Challis before watching his side collapse to a 3-0 home defeat against Bristol City.

Football is not renowned for job security and, after his side's sorry performance on Saturday, Hill's position looked about as assured as his side's shaky defence.

Only Swindon have conceded more goals at home in Division Two this season and Luton need to stop the flow quickly if they are to avoid relegation.

Danny Wilson's Bristol side managed just seven shots on Saturday, but all were on target and three ended up in Nathan Abbey's net - in the space of 12 suicidal second-half minutes!

Hill made changes to his side for the sixth successive match, dropping Julian Watts and opting for a three-man back-line of Paul McLaren, Kent Karlens and Emmerson Boyce. But McLaren, currently being switched from midfield to defence by the game, and Boyce, increasingly uncomfortable in his left-sided berth, both struggled in the second-half.

City went ahead on 55 minutes after Brian Tinnion's deep cross caused confusion between Boyce and Abbey at the far post. Scott Murray seized on the loose ball and forced a clumsy, bobbling effort over the line.

The Ashton Gate club had been limited to speculative long-range efforts before Murray's goal but, after it, Luton crumbled just like they had in the previous home game against Wrexham.

Confidence, cohesion and common sense went out of the window and if the club are to halt their headlong plunge towards Division Three a game plan or tactical switch must be devised that arrests the panic following the conceding of a goal.

Lee Peacock scored the visitors' second on 64 minutes, showing great composure to beat an exposed Abbey with a calmly delayed shot that drifted into the grounded Luton keeper's top corner.

City went into the match as the division's form side with an 11-game unbeaten run so they hardly needed Matthew Spring's generosity on 67 minutes but accepted it all the same.

Hill View

I have not ranted and raved because we did not warrant a 3-0 defeat. The first-half was decent but if we continue to concede silly, silly goals it will be very difficult to build confidence and a run of victories. The way we keep collapsing at home is leading to a sorry state of affairs. As soon as we go behind the discipline goes, naivety sets in and we push forward without thought or purpose and give the ball away.

matchfacts

LUTON TOWN 0 BRISTOL CITY 3

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Paul McLaren, Kent Karlens, Emmerson Boyce, Gavin McGowan, Matthew Spring, Petri Helin, Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Stuart Douglas (Andrew Fotiadis, 45), Mark Stein (Rocky Baptiste, 75). Subs not used: Julian Watts, Adam Locke, Mark Ovendale.

● **BRISTOL CITY:** Steve Phillips, Keith Millen, Louis Carey, Matthew Hill, Scott Murray, Mickey Bell, Brian Tinnion (Ivan Tistimetanu, 89), Simon Clist, Aaron Brown (Joe Burnell, 53), Tony Thorpe (Peter Beadle, 62), Lee Peacock.

● **Referee:** Mark Cooper.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 4 Bristol City 7.

● **Off Target:** Luton 8 Bristol City 0.

● **Corners:** Luton 7 Bristol City 3.

● **Top Hatter:** Taylor - Impressing in a struggling side.

THE HATTERS youth team enjoyed a 2-0 Football League Youth Alliance victory at Southend United on Saturday. Top scorer Chris Dillon netted his 10th goal of the season and Duane Clarke scored the other. The juniors next match is at home to Leyton Orient on Saturday. Kick off is 11am at Luton Rugby Club.

Spring surrendered possession carelessly in Bristol's half and, with his team-mates hopelessly out of position, was punished as the visitors swept upfield and an unmarked Mickey Bell drove in firmly off a post from the edge of the area.

The home crowd's subsequent frustration was understandable. Their side had the better chances in a well-contested first-half with Matthew Taylor's darting runs down the left a regular feature.

His outwinging corners also caused problems and could have led to the first goal of the game when Karlens headed wide from close range on six minutes.

Stuart Douglas forced City keeper Steve Phillips into a fine save on 34 minutes after the 22-year-old striker's persistence had taken him past two away defenders.

Liam George then wasted two opportunities to give his side the lead. First, the Eire under-21 international exchanged passes with Mark Stein before finishing with a lack of conviction and, shortly afterwards, he burst dangerously into the penalty box, skillfully evading two tackles, only to balloon his side-footed effort over the bar.

Petri Helin, playing in the centre of midfield on his home debut, also went close just three minutes before the visitors took the lead.

The Finnish international neatly side-stepped a challenge before drilling a low shot narrowly wide.

If any of those chances had gone in Saturday's scoreline could have been very different.

But results not 'ifs' and 'buts' are needed fast and the Hatters now face two games of immense importance.

Friday night's FA Cup first-round home clash against non-league giant-killers Rushden & Diamonds could not come at a more inopportune time.

And that match will be followed by a crucial league match at fellow strugglers Port Vale where defeat could leave Luton eight points adrift of a place above the relegation zone.

After Saturday's defeat Hill had presided over a run of two wins from 21 games despite bringing in eight new players since taking over the managerial reins.

Only Huddersfield have lost more home games in the Football League this season and Saturday's setback was made more worrying by the fact that unfit captain Marvin Johnson was the only player unavailable for selection.

