

Sad Hatters go to pot in Lil's first offering

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Port Vale 3 Luton Town 0

NEW Luton manager Lil Fuccillo can take no comfort from any aspect of this comprehensive defeat in his first league match in charge.

It was the most inept display of the season so far. If they are to avoid relegation the Hatters must take maximum points from the teams closest to them in the lower reaches of the table.

But yesterday, one of them Port Vale was superior in every sphere of the game.

Indeed, the Town forced just two saves from the home goalkeeper in 90 minutes, so ineffective was their performance.

Fuccillo played both new boys from the start. Adrian Whitbread joined Julian Watts and Kent Karlsen in a back three with Emmerson Boyce and Matthew Taylor at wing back.

Lee Nogan played up front in company with Liam George.

Fuccillo said they had been working on the formation in training, but it didn't look as if the players had been introduced to one another especially during a dreadful first half.

Things that should have been ironed out in pre-season practice are having to be worked out in league games...and it shows.

The Valiants moved faster, passed infinitely better and forced no fewer than 11 corners to one before the break.

Tony Naylor should have put them in front after just four minutes but he contrived to miss an absolute sitter. Put clear by a terrible back pass from midfield, he outpaced Watts only to shoot wide of the stranded Nathan Abbey's goal.

Naylor was wide once more when allowed a free header.

At last the town got inside their opponent's half of the field when Nogan made a fine run down the right wing that ended with a weak Matthew Spring header.

And from the Town's first corner Taylor almost made Vale pay for their wastefulness. His left footed flagkick from the right almost curled directly into goal, Mark Goodlad making a diving save to deny the youngster.

These were rare excursions, however, and Alex



■ Matthew Taylor (left) and Dave Brammer battle for possession

Smith was cutting the Town defence every time he made a run down the left or through the centre.

The pressure had to pay eventually and from Vale's ninth corner, taken by Smith, defender Michael Walsh powered in a 34th minute header.

At least that brought the Town into some sort of life but the home side were still more dangerous and Abbey had to make two brilliant stops to keep the Town within striking range at the interval.

First he kept out Dave Brammer's shot, then sprang up to stop Marc Bridge-Wilkinson making it two.

Wilkinson then broke clear, passed square to Naylor and Abbey had to spread himself to grab the ball cleanly as the striker went sprawling.

The Town started much brighter in the second half but just when they looked like doing something and when the crowd was getting at the Vale players, Karlsen's 54th minute mistake virtually presented them with the points.

His weak attempt to head back to Abbey was easily intercepted by the nippy Naylor, who made no mistake this time.

Boyce did force a good save out of Goodlad

from a dangerous Petri Helin cross but the home side were now full of confidence and scored their third within six minutes.

Jeff Minton cut through to the edge of the town box and when he was checked by the back-line he curled a beauty over them and into the far corner of the net.

Having had no luck in buying a target man, Fuccillo pushed Watts up front to support George and substitute Fotiadis. The Town looked marginally better without causing their hosts any real problems.

Fuccillo said afterwards: "Some of the stuff they did today was schoolboy. I think where we really lost the game was in midfield.

"The engine room which functioned so well last week looked like three different players today.

"The team looked frightened for some unaccountable reason."

Luton: Abbey, Boyce, Whitbread, Karlsen, Watts, Taylor, McLaren, Spring, Helin (Fraser 77m), Nogan (Fotiadis 74), George.

Subs not used: Ovendale, Locke, Scarlett Attendance 4194.