

Boss 'disgusted' by his Vale flops

HATTERS boss Lil Fuccillo admitted he was 'disgusted' after watching his team go down 3-0 at fellow strugglers Port Vale on Saturday.

Defeat left Luton seven points adrift of a place above the relegation zone and left Fuccillo under no illusions about the task he faces to steer the club to safety.

The new Hatters manager confessed that he had not 'blasted' or 'slated' his side in the dressing room afterwards but did not hold back in his post-match press conference, saying: "I feel disgusted that we produced a novice-like second-half performance considering the amount of fans that were shouting and cheering for us."

"The team looked frightened and I cannot put a finger on why that should be. Some of the things the boys did were schoolboy errors. Our crossing was abysmal and we lost the game in midfield. Our engine room was fantastic against Rushden, but they looked like three different players against Port Vale."

Fuccillo's frustration was understandable. Finnish international Petri Helin looked lost in midfield and was virtually anonymous until his 78th-minute substitution.

Matthew Spring, who only eight days previously won Sky TV plaudits after completing his manager's target of making five tackles in the first 10 minutes of a game, struggled to make five challenges all afternoon and skipper Paul McLaren seemed to lack confidence.

But if the Hatters midfield trio were poor at Vale Park then they were in good company. Luton chose Saturday's vital game to turn in their worst display of a sorrowful season and only on-loan defender Adrian Whitbread can take any satisfaction from the match.

Whitbread, while hardly starring, at least looked capable of holding his own at this level of football. The stark reality for Fuccillo is that the rest of the team looked like they were playing in the wrong division.

Port Vale, fifth from bottom before Saturday's game, outclassed a Luton team that has now gone 11 games since their last away win.

Non-league Canvey Island, who normally take on the likes of Hitchin Town, had scored four against Vale in the FA Cup on the previous weekend. But Luton could not even manage that many shots on target against Brian Horton's men! The home side dominated from the start

THE HATTERS' LDV Vans Trophy first-round clash at Peterborough United on Tuesday is pay on the night only for visiting fans. Prices in the seats are £10 for adults and £1 for concessions. Admission to the terraces is £5 for adults and £1 for concessions. Eight Nationwide Conference sides are also in this season's competition.

and Tony Naylor should have opened the scoring twice in the first seven minutes.

First, the Vale striker fired wide after being put clear through by a loose Spring pass and then he headed over from a cross by left-winger Alex Smith, who was given the freedom of Staffordshire to deliver telling balls in the opening exchanges.

Luton's defence conceded corner after corner in clearing Smith's centres, but the tricky 24-year-old was equally as adept with his dead-ball delivery.

And it was inevitably a Smith corner that saw Vale break the deadlock on 34 minutes, Michael Walsh heading in after escaping the attentions of marker Kent Karlson.

Hatters keeper Nathan Abbey then reacted well to palm Marc

Bridge-Wilkinson's effort around a post before the break.

At the other end, Luton hardly threatened Mark Goodlad's goal with the home keeper only called into action twice, catching Spring's tame header comfortably and punching out a dangerous inswinging corner from Matthew Taylor.

The Hatters had arrived at Vale Park with a clean sheet the main priority but, having conceded a goal in such a crucial fixture, needed to rely on more than the hope of a counter attack in the second-half.

Andrew Fotiadis' 74th-minute introduction for flagging debutant Lee Nogan was also long overdue, especially when the home side had scored two more goals to secure maximum points.

Naylor capitalised on a calamitous Karlson error to double his team's lead on 64 minutes.

The Norwegian defender attempted a headed back pass that was never going to reach Abbey and Naylor intercepted before finishing with finesse.

Seconds later, Emmerson Boyce had Luton's best opportunity of the afternoon but his diving header was kept out by Goodlad and, on 71 minutes, Jeff Minton netted the home side's third. Minton took

advantage of the lack of a Luton challenge to curl an edge-of-the-area effort into Abbey's top corner.

The game then descended into farce with Julian Watts being pushed uphill as an emergency striker and Bridge-Wilkinson almost eclipsing famous efforts from Pele and David Beckham when his terrific last-minute shot from the half-way line drifted into the crossbar of a

match facts

PORT VALE 3 LUTON TOWN 0

● **PORT VALE:** Mark Goodlad, Matthew Carragher, Allen Tankard (Sagi Burton, 63), Dave Brammer (George O'Callaghan, 78), Michael Walsh, Michael Cummins, Tony Naylor (Richard Eyre, 83), Tommy Widdington, Marc Bridge-Wilkinson, Jeff Minton, Alex Smith. Subs not used: Dave Delaney, Michael Twiss.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Adrian Whitbread, Julian Watts, Kent Karlson, Emmerson Boyce, Matthew Spring, Paul McLaren, Petri Helin (Stuart Fraser, 78), Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Lee Nogan (Andrew Fotiadis, 74). Subs not used: Mark Ovendale, Adam Locke, Andre Scarlett.

● **Referee:** Alan Kaye.

● **Shots on target:** Port Vale 5 Luton 3.

● **Off Target:** Port Vale 9 Luton 2.

● **Corners:** Port Vale 12 Luton 3.

● **Top Hatter:** Adrian Whitbread - ordinary in poor display.

Lil View

I thought we would definitely get something out of the game even if it was a 0-0 draw but Port Vale ran the show from the first to last minute. Some of the things the boys did were schoolboy errors. That cannot come from me, John Moore or any other manager. It has to come from them on the park. I've not blasted the boys because they have done well in recent weeks. We need to pick them up not slate them.

