

Toothless Hatters in tatters

LUTON TOWN paid for a spectacular failure to take their chances by losing 3-0 at home to Colchester United on Saturday.

The Hatters fired their third successive blank despite a staggering 19 attempts on visiting keeper Andy Woodman's goal. Colchester went into the game with the division's worst goals for record, but still managed to give the struggling home side a lesson in finishing with well-taken goals from Barry Conlon, David Gregory and sub Thomas Pinault.

Lil Fuccillo's men have now failed to score in four of their last five matches with the brilliant 3-1 win at Stoke proving an anomaly during that shot-shy sequence. Peter Thomson, the two-goal Britannia Stadium hero, missed Colchester's visit because of an ankle injury and his replacement Lee Nogan, whose one-month contract expires next week, did little to suggest that he is the man to fire Luton to safety.

The Hatters have struggled to score in front of their own fans all season aside from three-goal flurries against Bristol City and Wrexham when a more adventurous three-pronged front-line was employed from the start.

In fact, Saturday was the sixth time in 10 league games this season that the opposition's goalkeeper has left Kenilworth Road with a clean sheet.

Only Bristol Rovers have scored less home goals in the division and three of their six came against the Hatters!

Not even the return of chairman Mike Watson-Challis from holiday in America was blessed with a goal and four chances were missed before Colchester took the lead. Liam George shot over from the edge of the box on 13 minutes and, moments later, Adrian Whitbread's long-range dipping volley was kept out by Woodman.

George then outstripped ex-Hatter Gavin Johnson for pace to latch on to Matthew Spring's through ball but delayed his shot and passed up an excellent scoring opportunity. Spring and George combined again on 25 minutes with the Irish striker's clever reverse pass teeing up Petri Helin.

The Finnish international was prominent in the early stages but his low shot was saved by Woodman's legs.

At the other end, Nathan Abbey had to be at his athletic best to stop Conlon's shot on the turn after 23 minutes.

But Conlon's powerful presence posed the Hatters problems all afternoon and the strapping striker got on the scoresheet moments later.

If target men are thin in numbers as Fuccillo looks to beef up his attack then Colchester boss Steve Whitton seems to have narrowed down the market further after snapping up Conlon on loan from lowly York.

Conlon bagged his second goal in as many games on 28 minutes after picking up Whitbread's stray pass 40 yards from goal. The former Southend forward then ran unopposed into the home penalty box, using an unmarked Karl Duguid as a decoy before skipping past an ineffectual challenge from Julian Watts and sidefooting low into Abbey's bottom corner.

match facts

LUTON 0 COLC'STER 3

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Adrian Whitbread, Julian Watts, Marvin Johnson, Petri Helin, Matthew Spring, Adam Locke (Andrew Fotiadis, 56), Paul McLaren, Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Lee Nogan. Subs not used: Andre Scarlett, Peter Holmes, Stuart Fraser, Mark Ovendale.

● **COLCHESTER:** Andy Woodman, Gavin Johnson, Scott Fitzgerald, Aaron Skelton, Joe Dunne (Simon Clark, 34), Micky Stockwell (Thomas Pinault, 73), Chris Keeble, David Gregory, Jason Dozzell (Steve McGavin, 61), Barry Conlon, Karl Duguid.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 8 Colchester 7.

● **Off target:** Luton 11 Colchester 3.

● **Corners:** Luton 5 Colchester 0.

● **Top Hatter:** Taylor - honest endeavour.

Watts almost made amends when he headed Matthew Taylor's free-kick over. Adam Locke and Nogan also went close to equalisers on the stroke of half-time but the home side's hopes were dealt a massive blow just three minutes after the interval when a right-wing cross from former Luton defender Aaron Skelton was met by a perfect glancing Gregory header that nestled into Abbey's bottom corner.

George was again guilty of dithering in front of goal after a cross from sub Andrew Fotiadis on 59 minutes and Taylor then smacked the foot of a post with a 25-yard piledriver. Fotiadis and McLaren squandered further chances before Colchester sub Pinault grabbed his first ever senior goal on 76 minutes.

The Frenchman drilled a low drive emphatically past Abbey from the edge of the area after Chris Keeble's lay-off. There was still time for McLaren and George to waste opportunities for a consolation but Luton finished a frustrating day pointless and goalless.

Fuccillo's verdict

I think there must be a voodoo when we play at home. We look frightened when we have to entertain our own fans. We had enough chances to score goals but one did not come. It could have been 4-3 to us but they did a good job and made it difficult for us with one up front and five across the park. The result looks like a mauling but I think we were only outplayed for nine first-half minutes.

