

# Lil's boys dead and buried!

LIL FUCCILLO dismissed almost half of his players as "dead wood" after watching the Hatters collapse to a 4-1 defeat at Reading.

The Kenilworth Road Club currently boast 30 professionals on their books, but Fuccillo believes that as many as a dozen of his inherited squad are surplus to requirements.

A frank Fuccillo said: "To be brutally honest the club is not in good shape from the point of view of players.

"There are almost 12 that I would describe as dead wood who have to be moved on now or might have to leave when their contracts expire.

"I've seen enough games now to know we are not good enough. I looked at the bench against Reading and there was not a lot there.

"It's going to be a long season. The squad is not good enough and I can understand how the club has got into this position.

"There's too many bad players. It's difficult to attract better quality players because people look at us and think crikey who wants to go to Luton Town.

"Better players also cost more but if you give 12 free transfers it's worth it to get three or four better players on good wages."

Striker Rocky Baptiste, a second-half replacement at Reading, is almost certainly included in the dead wood Fuccillo is ready to chop.

The Hatters boss was unimpressed by Baptiste's brief seven-minute outing, saying: "I think I made a mistake bringing him on. He's still a non-league player and we have not got the time to service people like that.

"He's not a youngster. He's 28."

Baptiste's fate may be sealed but other players such as Kent Karlsen, Gavin McGowan, Tresor Kandol, Peter Holmes, Friedrich Breitenfelder and Dean Brennan must be nervously looking over their shoulders because on Saturday Fuccillo felt they did not even warrant a place on the substitutes' bench!

If the Hatters squad is lacking, however, the starting 11 are also not up to scratch.

The defeat at Reading was the fourth time in the last five league games that Luton have lost by three clear goals.

The Hatters still harboured play-off hopes this time last season but, with barely half the 2000/2001 campaign played, it will not just be the town's Christmas decorations that go down in the New Year if the football club continue to display such slipshod defending.

Fuccillo chose to vilify his forwards after Saturday's match but also recognised the calamitous role his back-line played in defeat.

Jamie Cureton profited with a hat-trick for the Royals and Barry Hunter also got on the scoresheet as the visitors conceded three goals from set-pieces.

The first two home goals came from corners after Luton had enjoyed the better of the opening exchanges.

Andrew Fotiadis and Liam George both sent shots wide and Matthew Taylor warmed Reading keeper Phil Whitehead's hands with a free-kick before Cureton saw the home side's first serious shot turned brilliantly behind by Nathan Abbey on 22 minutes.

Alan Pardew's men went ahead from the resulting corner taken by Darren Caskey.

Cureton was temporarily kept off the scoresheet again by an excellent reflex save by Abbey, but Hunter was first to follow up and slammed the ball into the roof of the net.

The Hatters defence were equally as sluggish in their reaction to a 35th-

## match facts

### READING 4 LUTON 1

● **READING:** Phil Whitehead, Matt Robinson, Adi Viveash, Barry Hunter, Darren Caskey, Martin Butler, Lee Hodges (Sammy Igoo, 70), Jamie Cureton (Tony Rougier, 90), Phil Parkinson, Neil Smith, Ricky Newman. Subs not used: Andy Gurney, Scott Howie, John Mackie.

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Emmerson Boyce, Adrian Whitbread, Marvin Johnson (Stuart Fraser, 26), Petri Helin, Matthew Spring, Paul McLaren (Adam Locke, 54), Matthew Taylor, Liam George (Rocky Baptiste, 83), Andrew Fotiadis, Lee Nogan. Subs not used: Mark Ovendale, Andre Scarlett.

● **Attendance:** 10,771.

● **Shots on target:** Reading 7 Luton 3

● **Shots off target:** Reading 7 Luton 5

● **Corners:** Reading 3 Luton 7.

● **Referee:** S Tomlin.

● **Top Hatter:** Matthew Spring - improved display.

minute short-corner routine that saw Caskey's low delivery helped on by Butler to a grateful Cureton, who swept the ball in from close range.

It was all too easy for a Reading team who had hardly had to break a sweat to earn their two-goal advantage.

Luton enjoyed long spells of possession after the break and Fotiadis almost reduced the arrears on 65 minutes when his deflected shot looped over Whitehead but was cleared off the line by Royals' defender Adi Viveash.

An unmarked Lee Nogan did not get the visitors five minutes later, heading in against a former club for the second successive game when he directed Matthew Spring's deeply-struck corner in off a post.

The Hatters should have been capable of pushing for a point against a home team that had failed to threaten Abbey's goal since the interval but more terrible defending ensued.

Taylor's poor 80th-minute clearance cannoned into the path of Butler whose shot was badly spilled by Abbey and Cureton pounced to kill off the Royals.

The diminutive ex-Bristol Rovers striker then claimed the matchball with a minute left, leaping unchallenged at the far post to head Caskey's free-kick.

A miserable afternoon for the visitors was compounded by a collection of injuries picked up during the match with club captain Marvin Johnson and team captain Paul McLaren the most serious casualties.