

Heartache for Hatters

00/01 (FAC)

**Luton Town 3
Queens Park Rangers 3
FA Cup □ third round**

A RIDICULOUS handball by Lee Nogan two minutes from time handed QPR an undeserved equaliser from the penalty spot and cost Hatters a certain place in the fourth round.

A fighting performance from Hatters in an entertaining tie earned a lucrative replay at Loftus Road and a place in tonight's draw.

But it could have been so much better as the Hatters were cruising at half time. They led by two goals and had outclassed their Division One opponents.

Andrew Fotiadis and Liam George, gave the Hatters that lead, but two Peter Crouch goals in five minutes early in the second half levelled things.

Stuart Douglas made an explosive comeback by blasting in Luton's third and with the defence comfortably repelling the QPR attack, a confidence boosting win seemed certain.

The town welcomed Douglas back on to the bench after a long injury, while George and Emmerson Boyce returned to the starting line-up. Both made immediate impressions.

Cool

George added pep to the attack and Boyce showed some cool defending.

Mark Ovendale was again preferred to Nathan Abbey in goal and he had some pretty routine stuff to save before the Hatters got into their stride.

Clark Carlise was lucky only to see a yellow card for tripping Matthew Spring on the edge of the box before Nogan took the ball round a couple of defenders to get in a shot that was blocked by the massive Ludo Miklosko advancing from his goal.

Fotiadis set up George for a run at the defence and he would surely have won a penalty had he gone down under an untidy

challenge.

But he stayed upright to put in a shot that was deflected wide.

It did not matter because the Hatters took the lead from the resulting corner. Spring curled it into the near post where Fotiadis escaped his marker with a late run to nod neatly into the net.

A concerted attack brought the second goal. Mathew Taylor and Spring both had shots blocked before the ball fell to George's sweet left boot and was hooked home.

The only chance the visitors created in the first half was on the break. Richard Langley broke clear but made a real mess of his shot from a good position.

Luton's supremacy was threatened two minutes after the break.

Petri Helin played Crouch on side following a long ball from substitute Gavin Peacock.

The lanky striker controlled the ball beautifully and then stroked it past Ovendale.

Crouch doubled his money five minutes later. Karl Connolly's lovely chip landed perfectly on Crouch's head after the home defence had been left in tatters.

Douglas was introduced in the 70th minute at the expense of Fotiadis.

The substitution proved inspirational because Douglas produced a goal with his first meaningful touch.

From tight on the by-line he hammered the ball into the net via the unfortunate defender Carlise, who simply could not get out of the way so fierce was the Douglas strike.

An injury to Helin brought Stirling on and he earned his corn immediately by clearing a Connolly shot off the line. In the dying embers, Nogan stuck out an arm for an utterly needless penalty.

Peacock sent Ovendale the wrong way from the spot and the teams must now meet again to dispute a fourth round place.

Luton Town: Ovendale, Boyce, Whitbread, Fraser, Helin, (Stirling 79), Spring, Locke, Taylor, George, Nogan, Fotiadis (Douglas 70),

Attendance 8,677

Luton Man of the Match: Adrian Whitbread.



■ Hatters joy: Andrew Fotiadis opens Luton's account (above) and Liam George makes it 2-0 before half time in a thrilling F A Cup tie with QPR



Injuries slowly improving

LUTON manager Lil Fuccillo at last had some good news after Thursday's reserve team game at Norwich.

Kent Karlsen, Jude Stirling, Liam George, and perhaps most importantly Stuart Douglas, all came through without further problems.

Fuccillo said: "Karlsen played 90 minutes, but didn't look anything like fit. Douglas, though, was upset to be taken off after an hour. He wanted to stay on, but we didn't want fatigue to set in.

"He is important to us and so we have wrapped him in cotton wool. Hopefully we can now reap the benefit of that for the remaining four months of the season," said the Luton boss.

"Liam George came through 55 minutes well, but Peter Thomson only lasted 30 minutes and is still sore.

"Of the other injuries, Emmerson Boyce trained on Thursday after

seeing a specialist and looked all right, and Stuart Fraser had a miraculous recovery within 24 hours of coming off at Bournemouth. But Mark Stein doesn't seem able to shrug off his injury."

Fuccillo has had stern words with the players as the relegation worries grow. "If I had been a player hearing what I said on Tuesday about some of them not wanting to play for the club, I would have been knocking on the door saying - 'Don't put me in that category.' No-one has done that," he said

"I have had a word with two or three of lads who are in effect cheating the fans, the club and themselves - and they will be going.

"We have circularised lower league and conference clubs, but I haven't had one phone call. That bears out what I have been saying - the squad isn't good enough."

Fuccillo has had no luck bringing in players either. "With Gareth Taylor and Richard Walker, we

were told to ring back in the new year. We have done that and their clubs appear to be stalling. That's no good to us.

"We were looking at a left sided midfielder and were told we could have him. Now the club has changed its mind and we start again.

"It is only the big clubs who have the experienced players we are interested in and they can afford to keep them although they will only ever play reserve team football.

"We almost got Sam Parkin from Chelsea, but he turned us down for Wycombe who come here on Friday night.

"They have a good side with some of everything you need in this division. It will be a difficult match, but not on the scale of Wigan who came here with £4 million's worth on the bench.

"We have four months to go and we just have to roll up our sleeves even higher and battle," said Fuccillo.



■ Stuart Douglas fires across goal before being deflected in for Luton's third