

Sad Hatters Ram-raided

LUTON TOWN'S headlong plunge towards Division Three gathered pace with a depressing 2-1 home defeat against Wycombe Wanderers on Friday night.

The result was the ninth league match Luton have lost on their own ground this season which is more than any of the other 113 Premiership, Nationwide League and Nationwide Conference clubs and only Sheffield Wednesday have conceded more goals at home in all five divisions.

Lil Fuccillo is still waiting for his first clean sheet in the league since taking over as manager and the club's last shut-out was away to bottom side Oxford United in mid-October.

The Hatters' inability to hold on to leads is also playing a major part in their increasingly desperate plight. Fuccillo's side have gone in front in each of their last three games but have gone on to lose two and draw one.

All these statistics make sorry reading for Hatters fans but the cruellest irony on Friday was that the visitors' two-goal hero Andy Rammell could easily have been playing for the home side instead.

Previous Luton manager Ricky Hill talked to Walsall about Rammell in August but said at the time: "He's somebody who has been mentioned in passing but I've spoken to Ray Graydon and he would cost more than we would have expected. "We're still looking to make additions but I'm not anxious to bring in the wrong people by doing things in a rush."

Shortly afterwards, Rammell signed for Wycombe in a deal worth £50,000 and has not looked back since. Rammell is nicknamed 'Rambo' and, although the Hatters drew first blood by opening the scoring on 19 minutes, it was the bustling 33-year-old striker who enjoyed a starring role in front of the TV cameras, netting his ninth and 10th goals of the season.

Luton dominated the first-half and enjoyed a rare stroke of luck to take the lead when the ball bounced over the line off the shoulder of Wycombe keeper Martin Taylor after Adam Locke's terrific 25-yard volley had pinged back off a post.

Taylor was called into action again moments later when he got down well to keep out a low drive from captain Matthew Spring.

Stuart Douglas then clipped the bar with a header on 41 minutes but

matchfacts

LUTON TOWN 1 WYCOMBE W 2

● **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce (Jude Stirling, 83), Adrian Whitbread, Stuart Fraser, Friedrich Breitenfelder (Andre Scarlett, 79), Adam Locke, Matthew Spring, Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Peter Thomson (Tresor Kandol, 72), Stuart Douglas. Subs not used: Peter Holmes, Scott Ward.

● **WYCOMBE:** Martin Taylor, Chris Vinnicombe, Jason Cousins, Paul McCarthy, Matt Brady (Martin Lee, 46), Dannie Bulman, Michael Simpson, Steve Brown (Mark Rogers, 46), Daniel Senda, Andrew Baird (Sam Parkin, 46), Andy Rammell. Subs not used: Jamie Bates, Mo Harkin.

●Shots on target: Luton 6 Wycombe 8.

●Off target: Luton 3 Wycombe 6.

●Corners: Luton 8 Wycombe 7.

●Referee: Trevor Parkes (Birmingham).

- **Top Hatter:** Spring – never shy in front of cameras.

the home side could not add to their lead before the break.

At the other end, Mark Ovendale only had one serious first-half save to make when Rammell failed to connect properly from close range.

Andrew Baird hooked the visitors only other opportunity over from six yards after Rammell had headed across goal.

But an angry Lawrie Sanchez turned the game on its head when he made the unusual decision of making three half-time substitutions.

Martin Lee was one of the replacements and it was his 51st-minute corner that an unchallenged Rammell met with a towering header that sailed over Owendale to level the scores.

Daniel Senda then screwed an excellent chance wide shortly afterwards before Rammell scored his second on 63 minutes.

Ovendale's throw was intercepted and the ball was fed to another half-time substitute Sam Parkin.

Parkin, who joined Wycombe on loan from Chelsea after turning down the Hatters, fired in a low shot from 20 yards that Ovendale could not hold on to and Rammell was the quickest to react in the home penalty box, stabbing the ball over

the line from close range. Rammell almost claimed his hat-trick on 70 minutes but his far-post volley rocketed high and wide.

Parkin then went close with two late headers for the visitors as Luton failed to muster any kind of comeback.

The Hatters' second-half surge was pitiful with their confidence evaporating after Rammell's first effort. Only Liam George got near to a goal after the break but his header from eight yards out easily cleared Taylor's crossbar.

Fuccillo faces a series of headaches as he bids to avoid relegation with a squad that he has labelled the worst at the club since 1965 but his priority must be the defence.

Individually, Adrian Whitbread and Stuart Fraser both had decent games but, throughout this season, the backline has not added up to the sum of its parts and a change in formation may be needed if the Hatters are to become more difficult to beat and stand a chance of survival.

A change in playing personnel is the other option. Fellow strugglers Swindon and Oxford have recently strengthened their sides with big signings but Fuccillo admits that he is struggling to attract players to the depressing Kenilworth Road.

Lil Fuccillo's verdict

The second half was poor. I feel sorry for the fans who paid their money because we could not even raise a gallop or produce anything in the last 20 minutes. It was disturbing and embarrassing and we have seen that a few more players are not good enough. Emmerson Boyce put his hand up for the first and Mark Ovendale did for the second but that's more annoying because it means we know we are making mistakes but can't put them right. I can't see us getting through 90 minutes without conceding a goal as hard as we are trying to stop it.

