

Luton leave Joe in credit

BY TONY PASKIN

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JOE KINNEAR will officially take charge at Luton Town on Monday and, against all odds, he assumes the mantle of a winning side. But Kinnear has a history of upsetting applecarts, so perhaps this was to be expected.

Entering this derby game with six league defeats from seven starts, Luton were champing at the bit with the chance to impress the new man in their first taste of action since January 23.

Ninety minutes later they were celebrating only their second league away win of the season and a first clean sheet since mid-October.

Whether it was the lay-off or Kinnear's dressing room input alongside Lil Fuccillo,

the freshness was there for all to see.

They had the incentive of a goal inside the first four minutes when the unmarked Stuart Douglas met Lee Mansell's right-wing cross with his head and the ball flew into the top corner beyond Keith Welch.

It signalled notice that Luton were not there for the taking and a series of whole-hearted challenges, the worst of which brought first-half bookings for debutant Richard Dryden and Liam George confirmed the spirit of the 'Crazy Gang' had simply relocated a few miles north up the M1.

For all their huffing and puffing, Northampton fell down in the chances department and Luton could even have added to their lead. Skipper Matthew Spring tested Welch with a 25-yarder then Matthew Taylor saw his angled blast parried away by the home goalkeeper.

Northampton, who were beginning a critical sequence of five matches in 17 days which they hope will pep-up their play-off aspirations, made a double substitution at



OLD HEAD: Kinnear's presence proved inspirational

half-time and pushed a third man into attack in the shape of Steve Howard.

But it was the old pairing of Marco Gabbiadini and Jamie Forrester which almost contrived an equaliser, the latter seeing his flick-header just clear the crossbar after 55 minutes.

IT WAS Luton who almost saw daylight when George raced clear at the other end only for Welch to make a block with his body.

After Forrester had twice been denied inside a minute by Mark Ovendale, himself once on Northampton's books, Luton should have had their new boss breathing more easily with the award of a 68th-minute penalty by referee Mick Fletcher for a trip by Dave Savage on George. It

brought the first spot kick of the season at Sixfields, but the home crowd are still to see a successful one after Spring's shot hit the angle of post and crossbar and rebounded to safety.

In a frantic finale, George had a chance to seal Luton's victory when sent away by Lee Mansell, but after cutting neatly inside, the striker curled his shot wide.

Northampton went within an ace of levelling in injury-time when Howard's flick header from a John Frain free-kick drifted just wide.

NORTHAMPTON (4-4-2): Welch; Canoville (Green 46), Sampson, Hope, Frain; Hodge (Howard 46), Savage, Hunt, Hargreaves (Nicholson 77); Forrester, Gabbiadini. **Booked:** Howard.

LUTON (5-3-2): Ovendale; Helin, Boyce, Stirling, Dryden, Taylor; Spring, Mansell, Rowlands; Douglas (Fotiadis 87), George. **Booked:** Dryden, George, Mansell. **Goal:** Douglas 4.

Referee: M Fletcher (Warley).