

Joe welcomes a point on the road to safety

ANOTHER point closer to survival rather than two lost on the road to safety was Joe Kinnear's appraisal of Saturday's 0-0 draw with Bristol Rovers.

Kinnear's team, missing suspended midfield pair Matthew Spring and Lee Mansell, fought valiantly for a point without finding the attacking form of previous matches.

An equally-determined Rovers team must take much of the credit for that. And they could have also taken all three points back to the Memorial Ground if former Premiership referee Paul Danson had not disallowed Scott Jones' 69th-minute header for offside.

Jones rose to meet Marcus Bignot's 69th-minute corner with a downward header that squeezed in behind Hatters keeper Nathan Abbey and his left-hand post.

But Danson's assistant raised his flag and, to the relief of the home crowd, Jones' effort was ruled out. That decision was later verified by the television cameras but the Leicester official turned in an otherwise fussy, over-zealous and whistle-happy display which did not help the flow of a nervous encounter.

Both teams are fighting for their Division Two lives but Danson's award of free kick after free kick for minimal contact did not help the game as a spectacle.

Chances were few and far between with Liam George firing the first across the face of goal after three minutes. Skipper Paul McLaren, restored to midfield alongside a slim-line Adam Locke, then clipped the top of the bar with a dipping 20-yard shot.

At the other end, Richard Dryden enjoyed a forceful display against his old club and Abbey was recalled in goal because of a shoulder injury to Mark Ovendale.

And the 22-year-old keeper's clean sheet will have helped erase the memory of last season's corresponding fixture when he was booed off by his own fans after

PETER HOLMES answered an SOS call from manager Joe Kinnear on Saturday to take his place on the home substitute's bench. The 20-year-old midfielder was ready to watch the game in an executive box when Peter Thomson tore a calf muscle in the warm-up and Kinnear called for Holmes just 10 minutes before kick-off.

a 4-1 defeat. Abbey saved his side three times before the break.

On 14 minutes, he denied Ansh Owusu after the visitors' striker had sprinted clear on goal and then he executed a perfect tackle on the same player after Emmerson Boyce's under-hit back pass.

Abbey also spared the blushes of fit-again Julian Watts when he beat out the Hatters defender's goal-bound interception. On 51 minutes, Watts headed over the home side's best opportunity of the game when

match facts

LUTON 0 BRISTOL ROVERS 0

● **HATTERS:** Nathan Abbey, Emmerson Boyce, Julian Watts, Richard Dryden, Petri Helin, Adam Locke, Paul McLaren (Jude Stirling, 81), Keith Rowland, Mark Stein (Stuart Douglas, 68), Liam George. Subs not used: Andrew Fotiadis, Peter Holmes, Scott Ward.

● **BRISTOL ROVERS:** Nick Culkin, Che Wilson, Steve Foster, Scott Jones, Trevor Challis, Marcus Bignot, Dwayne Plummer, Simon Bryant (Vitalijs Astafjevs, 40), Mark McKeever, Nathan Ellington, Ansh Owusu (Clinton Ellis, 85). Subs not used: Justin Richards, Lewis Hogg, Ryan Clarke.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 3, Bristol Rovers 3.

● **Off target:** Luton 3, Bristol Rovers 3.

● **Corners:** Luton 5, Bristol Rovers 7.

● **Top Hatter:** Taylor - raking passes.

he rose unchallenged to meet George's corner.

Jones' disallowed effort was then followed by a Mark McKeever volley from the edge of the area that was inches off target before Watts atoned for his earlier miss with a point-saving tackle.

The former Bristol City defender cleared almost on his own goal-line as Rovers captain Steve Foster lunged for the loose ball after Abbey had flapped badly at a long cross into his penalty box.

A draw left Rovers unbeaten in their last five matches and Kinnear with just one defeat in six games since taking charge at Kenilworth Road.

But with Port Vale also improving and a John Beck-inspired Cambridge United winning only their second game since Boxing Day at the weekend the scramble for points at the bottom will continue to be frantic.

Joe Kinnear's verdict

There was a lot of caution from both sides. We had one good opportunity - Julian Watts' free header - and if it had been on target we would have won the game but we have got a clean sheet and one more valuable point which could show in the long run. Sometimes you have to dig in and get what you can out of games. We had a patched-up side and I would give credit to Bristol for the way they played. They were quicker than us in the middle park where we had Adam Locke trying to get fit again and Paul McLaren playing his first game in midfield this year.

