

Relegation looms!

Oxford score late to pile on the agony for Hatters



**Luton Town 1
Oxford United 1**

Dave Flett on last night's match at Kenilworth Road

Visitors' full-back John Robertson was lucky not to give away a penalty on 38 minutes when his clumsy challenge felled Howard in the box.

Knight then prevented his side from conceding a second on the stroke of half-time when he pulled off a tremendous save from McLaren.

Oxford could only get better after an apathetic first-half display and mustered their first effort on target shortly after the break, but Nathan Abbey was equal to the task, charging off his line to block a John Robertson header.

Spring should have doubled the home side's lead moments later after Howard's long throw caused panic in the Oxford defence.

But the Hatters' midfielder headed against the bar from three yards and then blazed the rebound wildly over.

Knight then saved a low drive from George and safely gathered a Howard header.

Luton suffered an injury blow on 70 minutes when Spring limped out of the action and was replaced by teenage defender Jude Stirling with Petri Helin moving into midfield.

Mansell almost continued his amazing goal-scoring streak on 72 minutes, but sent a glancing header just wide of Knight's goal.

But Joe Kinnear's men were left reeling and the Kenilworth Road crowd stunned on 77 minutes when Oxford equalised.

Gray's wayward overhead kick confused the Hatters' defence but was forced over the line at the far post by striker Andy Scott.

Kinnear responded by throwing on an extra striker in Stein and withdrawing Helin.

Mike's rescue act



WATSON-CHALLIS

HATTERS chairman Mike Watson-Challis is putting together a rescue package to save former club Baldock Town from extinction.

Baldock owe the Inland Revenue £87,000 but an £18,000 "token of good faith" is understood to have been paid by Watson-Challis to prevent the club going into administration.

The Hertfordshire club have been given 56 days by the High Court to clear up their financial problems.

Watson-Challis was chairman at Baldock before his arrival at Kenilworth Road in May 2000, but he is not responsible for the Dr Martens League club's debts.

● Town on Tour will be running coaches to Wrexham on Easter Monday.

They will leave Kenilworth Road at 10am and prices will be £14.50 for Supporters Club members, £16 for non-members and £12 for concessions.

big match line-up

● **LUTON TOWN:** Nathan Abbey, Emmerson Boyce, Richard Dryden, Petri Helin (sub 80 mins Mark Stein), Matthew Taylor, Matthew Spring (sub 70 mins Jude Stirling), Paul McLaren, Lee Mansell, Julian Watts, Steve Howard, Liam George. Other subs: Peter Thomson, Peter Holmes, Mark Ovendale (gk).

● **OXFORD UNITED:** Richard Knight, John Robertson, Paul Powell (sub 69 mins Joey Beauchamp), Jon Richardson, Wayne Hatswell, Darren Patterson, Sam Ricketts, Matt Murphy, Paul Tait (sub 42 mins Peter Fear), Andy Scott, Phil Gray. Other subs: Dean Whitehead, Steve Anthrobus, Phil Wilson (gk).

● Referee: David Pugh (The Wirral).
● Attendance: 6,010.
● Luton top player: Paul McLaren.

A 77th minute equaliser by Oxford striker Andy Scott looks to have condemned Luton Town to Division Three football next season.

The already-relegated visitors came away from Kenilworth Road with a 1-1 draw that makes survival for Joe Kinnear's men merely a mathematical long-shot.

Recalled Julian Watts had earlier given Luton a first-half lead, but despite managing a further 16 attempts on goal the home side could not add to their slender advantage.

Oxford rarely threatened at the other end, but Scott's shock goal proved enough for the division's bottom side to snatch a point in front of a dejected home crowd.

Watts and Liam George returned to the Hatters' starting line-up, with Keith Rowland sidelined by a groin injury and Mark Stein on the substitutes' bench.

Skipper Paul McLaren moved back into midfield, with Watts playing at the heart of the Luton defence.

Oxford included ex-Hatters Phil Gray and Darren Patterson in their side.

Luton controlled proceedings from the start with Steve Howard seeing a speculative effort turned over the crossbar by Oxford keeper Richard Knight after just three minutes.

Knight then comfortably caught an attempted lob from George before he saved McLaren's volley after a clever lay-off from Howard.

The Hatters went in front from Matthew Taylor's subsequent corner when an unmarked Watts marked his return to the side by getting the faintest of touches at the near post on 18 minutes.

Lack-lustre Oxford's only goal attempt of the first-half saw Patterson head tamely wide on 31 minutes.

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