



■ Stewart Douglas takes a tumble as the Hatters' hopes took a nosedive after a goalless draw with Oldham

Blankety blank has Hatters in the mire

YET another failure to gain three home points leaves the Hatters almost certainly having to win all six of their remaining games to avoid relegation.

Town fans, so disappointed with the 1-1 draw with relegated Oxford United on Tuesday, would have been more heartened by this display despite the lack of any goals.

The Kenilworth Road crowd gave magnificent support as the Town threw everything into a desperate attempt to grab the winner.

Chances were created in abundance with Paul McLaren hitting a post and Liam George responsible for the miss of this and any other season.

But for the second time in a week, Luton couldn't make constant pressure tell against a side whose only tactic was to waste time almost

**Luton Town 0
Oldham Athletic 0**

from the first whistle.

Friday the 13th was not a good Friday for Luton, either, with the club they were most likely to catch, Cambridge winning at Northampton. Any thoughts of resurrecting their second division status will now need a modern-day miracle.

Matthew Spring's hamstring injury sustained on Tuesday kept him out while Nathan Abbey dropped to the bench alongside Petri Helin.

Paul Shepherd, signed on deadline day, came in for his debut down the Luton right.

And Joe Kinnear went for a strike-force that hadn't scored from open play for 10 games: Stewart Douglas up front with Steve Howard, George, lining up just behind them.

The selection looked like producing a result as

early as the eighth minute. Lee Mansell's long ball enabled Howard to beat the offside trap, he got away from his marker but elected to shoot too early and Gary Kelly gathered easily.

Mark Ovendale, on his recall, and Emmerson Boyce had to be alert to snuff out rare Oldham excursions into the Town box but it was almost exclusively one-way stuff.

On the half hour, a long Howard throw, that proved to a patent weapon throughout, was hurled into the near post and headed on by Julian Watts.

McLaren, with Kelly out of his goal, could only hit a post from right in front.

McLaren returned the compliment minutes later when he made a super run down the right wing, crossed for Douglas to flick a header on to Howard whose solid header brought a diving Kelly save down low to his left.

The Hatters should have gained the lead they deserved in the 36th minute when Howard played a lovely ball inside the left back for Douglas to chase.

His inch-perfect pull-back left George with an absolutely open goal, but he scuffed a weak effort wide and straight into the grateful hands of the Oldham 'keeper. Town mascot Happy Harry would have scored with ease.

Luton just did not get the breaks in the second half. Watts, who had a magnificent game in both penalty areas, lofted a ball over the six-man Oldham defensive line but Boyce, also up from the back, could only shoot narrowly wide at full stretch.

Taylor had time to flash a right wing centre across the face of goal with no-one getting a touch before Douglas picked up a Howard flick-on to beat his man and get clean through only to be denied at the last when Kelly dived at his feet.

McLaren almost got a touch to a Watts overhead kick and Douglas produced a great header from a quality Taylor cross in the dying moments, but Kelly made yet another great save to deny him and probably consign Luton to the third division.

Luton Town: Ovendale, Boyce, Watts, Dryden, Shepherd, Taylor, McLaren, Mansell, George, Douglas, Howard. Subs not used: Stein, Thomson, Locke, Helin, Abbey. Attendance: 4,886. Luton MoM: Watts & Dryden.



■ Steve Howard battles away in vain