

20-goal man target!



Kinnear verdict

“We had nine clear-cut chances and could not take any of them. It was a catalogue of misses. Whichever strike force we are putting out the players are missing opportunities for fun. I am disappointed and sick about it but what can you do? We have tried everything in the dressing room. We need to get an experienced striker who will get us 20 goals.”

JOE KINNEAR will be shopping around for a “20-goals-a-season” striker this summer after his side fired more blanks against Oldham Athletic on Saturday.

The Hatters drew 0-0 with the Lancashire club despite creating twice as many goalscoring opportunities in a one-sided encounter. And afterwards a bemused Kinnear said: “We had nine clear-cut chances and could not take any of them.”

“It was a catalogue of misses. Oldham were never dangerous, but whichever strike force we are putting out the players are missing opportunities for fun.”

“I am disappointed and sick about it but what can you do? We have tried everything in the dressing room. The game was like a practice game with only us shooting. It was one-way traffic and I think we could have played without a keeper and still got a result.”

“We need to get an experienced striker who will get us 20 goals because if you look at our five main forwards you are lucky to get 20 between the lot of them.”

In fact, Liam George, Stuart Douglas, Mark Stein, Andrew Fotiadis and Peter Thomson had managed just 18 league goals collectively this season after Saturday’s match – an average of less than four apiece! That is a tally Kinnear finds unacceptable and highlights that, despite sporadic bursts from George, Luton have never replaced the consistent scoring exploits of Tony Thorpe.

Previous manager Lennie Lawrence opted for a three-pronged attack in the

match facts

● **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, Julian Watts, Richard Dryden, Paul Shepherd, Lee Mansell, Paul McLaren, Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Steve Howard, Stuart Douglas. Subs not used: Mark Stein, Peter Thomson, Adam Locke, Petri Hellin, Nathan Abbey.

● **OLDHAM:** Gary Kelly, Scott McNiven, Shaun Gamett, Mark Hotte (Ben Fletcher, 62), Barry Prenderville, Phil Salt (John Sheridan, 74), Lee Duxbury, Carlo Corazzin,

LUTON 0 OLDHAM 0

Tony Carrs, Matthew Tipton (Sam Parkin, 69), David Eyres. Subs not used: Paul Rickers, David Miskelly.

● **Shots On Target:** Luton 9 Oldham 4.

● **Off Target:** Luton 7 Oldham 4.

● **Comers:** Luton 7 Oldham 2.

● **Referee:** Phil Richards (Lancashire).

● **Top Hatter:** Watts – spirited display.

absence of a natural marksman and, on Saturday, Kinnear employed the same tactic in his search for goals. But George and Douglas failed to feed off Steve Howard, whose threat is nullified by the lack of suitable foils.

Luton now have the option of mixing a route one approach with their patient passing game, but long punts from the recalled Mark Ovendale aimed at Howard’s head reaped little reward against Oldham.

Long throws from Howard directed at Julian Watts fared little better with the home side rarely sharp enough to attack the second ball in the penalty box. But the match was still littered with enough scoring opportunities to give the Hatters a comfortable win. Howard should have done better on nine minutes when he got behind the visitors’ defence to collect a Lee Mansell long pass.

But the 6ft 2in striker chose to shoot from

the edge of the area instead of bearing down on Kelly’s goal and his snatched effort did not trouble the Oldham keeper. Four minutes later, skipper Paul McLaren volleyed over after a fine cross by debutant Paul Shepherd was headed into his firing range by Howard.

McLaren then hit a post from 12 yards out with Kelly well beaten on probably the only occasion Luton took advantage of a half-cleared throw-in from Howard.

Kelly saved a downward header from Howard on 34 minutes before George missed the best chance of the afternoon. Douglas used his pace to burst to the byline and pull the ball back after Howard’s precision pass had split the visitors’ defence. But George somehow contrived to miss the target from six yards and found the hands of a stranded but grateful Kelly.

George’s confidence levels appear to have plummeted to an all-time low, but Kinnear

was struggling for explanations afterwards, saying: “We’ve tried to give players confidence but you’re not telling me you need confidence to score a goal from six yards out.”

“I think I would have scored and we need to sharpen up in that area.”

George left the field at half-time with boos ringing in his ears from certain sections of the home crowd, but the jeers were drowned out by a crescendo of support after the break.

The Kenilworth Road faithful sang without a pause throughout the second-half but were still denied a goal to celebrate. Watts, who was impeccable in defence, headed wide on 47 minutes and, shortly afterwards, Emmerson Boyce sent a lunging volley wide from six yards.

Douglas then ran straight into Kelly when a deft chip could have broken the deadlock and Howard sent a deflected effort over just past the hour. Hatters could still have won the match in the 88th minute but Kelly produced a fine point-blank save from Douglas’ header after Matthew Taylor’s cross.

Oldham rarely threatened at the other end where Ovendale experienced a quiet return after swapping the goalkeeper’s jersey with the dropped Nathan Abbey for the eighth time this season. The only significant action saw him pull off comfortable saves from long-range David Eyres efforts and a late Sam Parkin shot. Visiting boss Andy Ritchie shook hands with every Hatters player at the final whistle and, no doubt, offered words of encouragement. But more dropped points saw the Division Two relegation trapdoor open a little wider for wasteful Luton.