



Sinking feeling: Luton manager Joe Kinnear realises there is nothing he can do to stave off relegation

Kinnear off as Luton go down

Nationwide Division Two

By John Ley

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JOE KINNEAR can seldom have felt so low during his managerial career as he did last night. He was banished from the touchline as Luton Town stumbled to the embarrassment of relegation to Division Three.

Kinnear spent seven years overseeing Wimbledon's success in frustrating the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool and Arsenal. He now faces the prospect of trying to persuade Luton that there is life in the League's basement.

It was 13 years ago to the day that Luton enjoyed one of their finest moments, winning the League Cup final against Arsenal at Wembley. But Chris Sedgwick's 76th-minute goal meant that Luton's demise through four divisions has been completed in the space of just nine years. They are in the bottom division for the first time in 33 years.

The result was as important, if not more so, to Rotherham. Their game in hand over rivals Reading was won, meaning they move into the second automatic promotion place with two games to play.

Kinnear was furious about the decisive goal, believing Mark Robins, once of Manchester United, to be offside as he crossed for Sedgwick to tap home from close range.

Referee Paul Armstrong cautioned two Luton players for their complaints then turned his attention to Kinnear; after a long lecture he sent the manager to sit in the stand.

The position of the dugouts at Luton meant Kinnear had to trudge halfway around the quagmire of a pitch and past more than 800 Rotherham fans.

Though flanked by security guards, Kinnear stopped briefly to face one vociferous traveller before moving on to the sanctuary of the stand.

Having suffered a heart attack before a Premiership game at Sheffield Wednesday a little over two years ago, Kinnear is well equipped to put this setback into perspective.

But having seen Oxford United, another of the clubs he spent a short spell at this season, also relegated, he may be wondering whether he should have accepted medical advice and retired. Luton will now join Oxford and Swansea City in dropping into the Third Division.

Just what has gone wrong at Luton in the last decade is difficult to define. Mismanagement, wasted opportunities and a hastiness to replace managers

has only added to the Bedfordshire club's speedy decline.

Last night, with their fate as good as determined even before their club record 12th home defeat of the season, Luton held out pluckily for much of the game, even occasionally threatening to score.

Had Liam George, who once promised so much, taken advantage of a Steve Howard cross, Luton might have taken a first-half lead. Instead he missed and, after the break, Rotherham dominated.

The visitors had two penalty appeals rejected and Sedgwick's cross-cum-shot hit the crossbar before the decisive goal. The win makes Rotherham favourites to accompany Millwall into Division One a year after they were promoted from the Third Division.

Kinnear refused to comment afterwards but Ronnie Moore, the Rotherham manager, said: "We have put ourselves into a hell of a position; we are now in the driving seat. But every time we have gone second before we have bottled it."

Luton Town: Ovendale; Shepherd, Boyce, Dryden, Johnson; Spring, McLaren, Taylor, Douglas, Howard, George (Stein 60).
Subs: Locke, Watts, Holmes, Ward (g). **Booked:** Taylor, Dryden, Johnson.

Rotherham United: Pettinger; Artell, Scott, Branston; Bryan, Talbot (Minton 90), Watson, Hurst, Sedgwick, Robins (Monkhouse 89), Barker. **Subs:** Wilsterman, Beech, Gray (g). **Booked:** Sedgwick, Talbot.

Referee: P Armstrong (Berkshire).