

NATIONWIDE DIVISION 3

Bristol Rov	3	LUTON	2
Carlisle	0	Hull	0
Cheltenham	2	Mansfield	3
Exeter	0	Scunthorpe	4
Hartlepool	1	Darlington	2
Kidd'ster	1	Torquay	0
Lincoln	3	Swansea	0
Macclesf'ld	0	Rushden	0
Oxford Utd	0	Shrewsbury	1
Plymouth	1	Rochdale	2
Southend	4	Halifax	1
York	2	L Orient	1

Hatters lose 100 per cent record

Bristol Rovers 3

Luton Town 2

SOMETHING had to give when two sides on maximum points clashed at the Memorial Ground yesterday.

Sadly for Hatters fans it was Luton who lost their 100 per cent record.

However, an injury-ravaged Town side never gave up – even though they should have been dead and buried before the interval.

They made Rovers fight all of the way to take over at the top of table in this thriller.

Luton went a goal behind after 30 minutes when Nathan Ellington slid in from six yards but, after Bristol conspired to miss a series of chances, Matthew Taylor scored a great 41st minute equaliser to put the game back into the melting pot.

Rovers got the luckiest of second goals from a vicious deflection off David Hillier's miss-hit shot and made it three when Karl Emberson nipped in with 15 minutes to play, to apparently seal the points.

Back came the Hatters when substitutes Stuart Douglas and Lee Mansell combined for the latter to score and set up a last 10 minutes that Rovers survived by the skin of their teeth.

The first half was typically Third Division – a mixture of goalmouth incidents and awful howlers. Martin Cameron almost gave Rovers the lead as early as the 11th minute when he charged down Emberson's hacked clearance that flew close to goal and the Luton keeper had to make a smart save to deny Ellington moments later.

The big and very quick striker was proving a real handful and the Town's new defensive combination with three at the back was not helping their cause.

Cameron missed an absolute sitter when Boyce and Stirling messed up in front of goal but the Town did concede when Emberson came out to try and help Johnson clear a right-wing cross.

Ellington beat them both to it to knock home the opener and could have gone on to claim a 10-minute hat-trick, only being foiled by some good saves and desperate defence.

Out of this mayhem, the Hatters fashioned an equaliser. The alert



■ Brave face: Manager Joe Kinnear takes it in his stride



■ In action: Stuart Douglas and Lee Mansell take on Rovers

Kevin Nicholls took a quick free kick, firing a 50-yard diagonal ball towards Taylor on the left.

Steve Foster made a nonsense out of it and the talented teenager smacked in a superb low shot across the goalkeeper and inside his far post.

The Town enjoyed more of the play after the break but were hit by that soft, deflected, 63rd minute Hillier effort and Rovers at last took advantage of a scramble in the Town area to grab a third through Kevin Gall when Emberson was stranded out of his goal.

Lee Mansell's 80th minute effort, however, set up a grandstand finish

when he was first to the breakdown after Douglas has fought and won the ball from a long Jude Stirling throw.

Despite several more long throws by the youngster, which caused the Pirates' defence considerable discomfort, Luton just could not capitalise, to the great relief of the home faithful.

Luton Town: Emberson, Stirling, Boyce, Johnson, Ian Hillier, (Douglas 76), Locke, Nicholls, Hughes (Mansell 46), Taylor, Griffiths, (Forbes 46), Howard, Subs not used Ovendale (GK), Dryden.

Attendance: 9,057

■ Equalising shot: Luton's Matthew Taylor scores in the 41st minute