

Better late than never for Luton against 10 men

IT WAS a case of better late than never as Luton eventually overcame 10-man Southend United at Kenilworth Road on Monday.

Late goals from Carl Griffiths and substitute Andrew Fotiadis secured a 2-0 win against a Southend side who had Mark Rawle sent off after just 19 minutes.

The visitors also missed a 28th-minute penalty when Kevin Maher's woeful spot-kick was easily saved by Hatters keeper Carl Emberson.

It was a somewhat laboured victory for Joe Kinnear's men, who struggled to break down a well-organised defence before the introductions of Stuart Douglas and Andrew Fotiadis added more mobility to the Hatters' front line.

Fotiadis staked his claim for a starting place with the Hatters' second goal after Griffiths had scored his third for the club, all of which have come from inside the six-yard box.

It was not a vintage display but maximum points moved Luton up to second in the table with crooked quartet Matthew Spring, Russell Perrett, Aaron Skelton and Liam George among others all to come back, as well as more new signings on the horizon.

The defensive deficiencies that had seen the side concede seven goals in the previous two matches were also less evident with Emberson Boyce enjoying an improved display alongside the recalled Richard Dryden as Kinnear switched back to a flat back four.

Steve Howard went close to opening the scoring on 15 minutes when his header was cleared off the line by Southend midfielder Start Thurgood.

But the opening stages were dominated by some eccentric refereeing by Joe Ross.

The London official started the

Joe's verdict

We are not doing too badly considering the amount of players missing and the lads out there did reasonably well. I have not been able to field our best team yet and am even playing people battling through injuries. When the rest of the squad is back we will be a real force.



game punishing almost every away foul with a caution and had already dished out four yellow cards to Southend players when Rawle received his second on 19 minutes for retaliation after a fair challenge by Ian Hillier.

Southend had more reason to feel aggrieved on 27 minutes when Emberson escaped an early bath after hauling down Daniel Webb in the penalty box.

Webb had intercepted Taylor's poor back pass and rounded Emberson before having his legs whipped from under him by the Hatters keeper.

Emberson escaped with a booking to the fury of the visitors fans and then rubbed salt in their wounds by comfortably saving Maher's dreadful penalty.

Marvin Johnson, who enjoyed an immaculate display at left-back, went close to breaking the deadlock on 31 minutes when his edge-of-the-area volley whistled over the bar.

Webb tested Emberson twice with second-half long-range efforts and skipper Phil Whelan also side-footed wide from a corner.

But the visitors' legs tired in the energy-sapping heat and Luton began to get on top during the last quarter of the match after Kinnear

switched to a three-pronged attack.

Taylor's inswinging free-kick hit the bar and Fotiadis' follow-up was cleared off the line by Leon Johnson on 75 minutes.

Shortly afterwards, a header from Luton's Johnson caused confusion in the visitors' penalty box and Griffiths pounced to force the ball over the line from two yards.

The 30-year-old striker then turned provider, laying the ball off to Fotiadis who fired a low left-footed effort into Darryl Flahavan's bottom corner.

Kevin Nicholls almost added a flattering third goal in injury time but his powerful drive went wide.

Afterwards, Hatters boss Kinnear said: "We were reckless again in giving away the penalty and we seem to have got a mistake in the bag for each game but we did not get punished today.

"I would not have been surprised if Carl Emberson had been given a red card to level things up after their player was sent off.

"The referee would probably say their striker was going away from goal so what bit of luck was going around we had.

"We could have found ourselves 1-0 down but that still might not have been enough for them.

"We always looked like we had a goal threat with three up front. We also had five of our best players missing which proves the squad is getting better.

"Matthew Spring, Aaron Skelton and Russell Perrett would all have been in the side.

"So we are not doing too badly considering the amount of players missing and the lads out there did reasonably well.

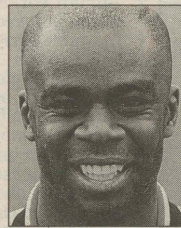
"I have not been able to field our best team yet and am even playing people battling through injuries like Paul Hughes and Richard Dryden.

"When the rest of the squad is back we will be a real force."



THE HERO OF THE HOUR: Carl Griffiths in the thick of the action against Southend. He nipped in to put Hatters in front and then set up a goal for Andrew Fotiadis.

match facts



TOP HATTER: Marvin Johnson hit form.

LUTON TOWN 2 SOUTHEND 0

● **HATTERS:** Carl Emberson, Ian Hillier, Emmerson Boyce, Richard Dryden, Marvin Johnson, Lee Mansell, Paul Hughes (Stuart Douglas, 57), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Taylor, Steve Howard (Andrew Fotiadis, 68), Carl Griffiths. Subs not used: Mark Ovendale, Peter Holmes, Adam Locke.

● **SOUTHEND:** Darryl Flahavan, Carl Hutchings, Phil Whelan, Leon Johnson, Stuart Thurgood, Kevin Maher, Daniel Webb (Dean Holness, 83), Mark Rawle, Tesfaye Bramble (David McSweeney, 66), Leon Cort, Tony Richards. Subs not used: Daniel Gay, Stephen Broad, Ben Smith.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 7 Southend 7.
● **Off target:** Luton 11 Southend United 7.
● **Corners:** Luton 9 Southend 5.
● **Referee:** Joe Ross (London).
● **Top Hatter:** Johnson - reliable.