



UNBELIEVABLE: On-loan emergency striker Ian Hillier is chased by ecstatic team-mates after his spectacular goal at York City. Picture: JANE SHERLOCK

Howard's spot of bother

STEVE HOWARD'S extraordinary on-field bust-up with his own Hatters' team-mates overshadowed a 2-1 victory at York City on Saturday.

Super-sub Ian Hillier struck a fantastic winning goal for the Hatters but would not have been on the pitch – let alone as an emergency striker – had it not been for Howard's astonishing temper tantrum.

The 6ft 3in striker missed a 52nd-minute penalty and then forcibly refused to let team-mates relieve him of spot-kick duties after referee Graham Salisbury had taken the unusual measure of ordering a retake.

Skipper Aaron Skelton, Marvin Johnson and Kevin Nicholls were among those violently pushed away by Howard, who also flouted orders from the bench before firing his second effort straight at home keeper Alan Fettis.

Hatters players then almost came to blows and, as the visitors squabbled among themselves, York broke up the other end and sub Marc Salvati put the ball in the net, only for the effort to be ruled offside much to the disgust of an incensed home crowd.

Howard continued to be involved in violent skirmishes with his own team-mates and Kinnear hauled him off when he and Nicholls had to be restrained from one another.

The former Northampton striker then muttered a few words to coach Mick Harford before collecting his tracksuit and storming into the dressing room.

They were amazing scenes of ill-discipline and Kinnear later promised tough action on the wayward striker. Earlier, goalscorer Carl Griffiths had also felt the wrath of Kinnear.

Griffiths, who cancelled out ex-Hatter Lee Nogan's 32nd-minute strike for York, was substituted at half-time after being cautioned and then almost being red-carded for two unnecessary displays of dissent that Kinnear later described as "stupid".

Luton are currently bottom of the Nationwide Fair Play League but

match facts

YORK CITY 1 LUTON TOWN 2

● **YORK CITY:** Alan Fettis, Darren Edmondson, Graham Potter, Mike Basham, Chris Brass, Lee Bullock, Lee Nogan, Michael Proctor, Nick Richardson (Christian Fox, 71), John Fielding, Michael Evans (Marc Salvati, 46). Subs not used: Russell Howarth, Richard Cooper, Matt Hocking.

● **HATTERS:** Carl Emberson, Emmerson Boyce, Aaron Skelton, Russell Perrett, Marvin Johnson, Adrian Forbes (Lee

Mansell, 46), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Liam George, Steve Howard (Ian Hillier, 58), Carl Griffiths (Stuart Douglas, 46). Subs not used: Mark Owendale, Richard Dryden.

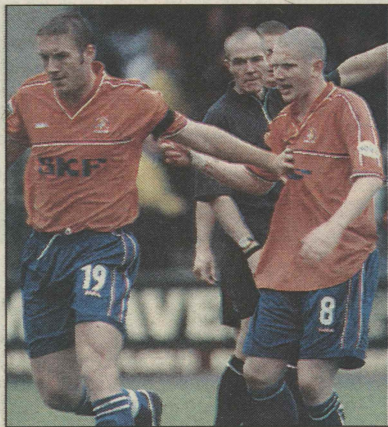
● **Shots on target:** York 5, Luton 8.

● **Off target:** York 3, Luton 7.

● **Corners:** York 6, Luton 3.

● **Referee:** Graham Salisbury.

● **Top Hatter:** Emmerson Boyce - alert and focussed.



SHOVE OFF: Steve Howard pushes team-mate Kevin Nicholls away.

Kinnear's response to Saturday's shenanigans appears to suggest a determination to stamp out the kind of ill-discipline that can undermine a promotion challenge.

The angry Hatters boss said: "It was dreadful and disgraceful behaviour in front of our own fans and I told Steve Howard that with a really good volley in front of all the players in the dressing room. Nobody is bigger than the club or myself and I won't accept anybody rearing up in that manner against their own team-mates."

"I've made it quite plain and clear that the last thing I want is players fighting with each other. I've seen many players lose their heads before

but I won't allow it against your own team-mates."

"Aaron Skelton had orders from me to take both penalties and we had the luck of taking two, but Steve Howard decided he was bigger and more powerful than anybody else and used brute force to overrule my authority and the captain's. He knows he should not have done it and has apologised to all the players."

"It could have proved costly but we managed to get the points."

In fact, Howard's debacle in an ironic twist of fate provided an unexpected platform for a Hatters victory in the shape of on-loan match-winner Hillier.

York were left reeling after Hillier's spectacular 74th-minute strike and finished the game point-less despite hitting the crossbar twice and seeing Salvati's effort disallowed during an incident-packed encounter.

The Hatters moved up to third in the table after Saturday's win and if any credence is to be given to the old cliché that a successful side is one that picks up points without producing altogether convincing performances then Kinnear's men could be champions by Christmas.

Luton are yet to fire on all cylinders this season and Saturday's display was marred by more missed chances, defensive mistakes and players struggling for full fitness.

Howard and the recalled Liam George both squandered two opportunities apiece before Nogan

netted against his old team-mates. The goal was created by pacy former Hatters loan target Michael Proctor, who skipped over a lunging challenge from the fully-committed Russell Perrett before crossing into the box.

Nogan coolly sidefooted past Carl Emberson in front of the away supporters and was then described as "lean, mean and a goal machine" by the over-excited Bootham Crescent tannoy announcer.

Luton should have fallen further behind on 37 minutes when on-loan Sunderland striker Proctor blazed over an unguarded net after Emberson had made a complete hash of an attempted punch.

But the visitors levelled the scores on 42 minutes when Griffiths stooped low to direct his header into Fettis' bottom corner after a right-wing cross from Nicholls.

A lapse in concentration seconds later almost saw York regain the lead but Emberson turned Nick Richardson's shot around a post.

An eventful first-half was then eclipsed by the series of incidents that followed Graham Potter's careless

push on Hatters sub Stuart Douglas in the penalty box.

Howard's first penalty produced a fine save from Fettis, who dived low to his right, but the Northern Ireland keeper was hardly required to move as he stopped the second effort that was drilled straight at him.

Salvati's chance was then ruled out and Darren Edmondson thudded a volley against the bar as York sought to capitalise on the visitors' disarray.

Only a brave stop by Emberson prevented home captain Chris Brass scoring on 70 minutes, but Luton went in front with an absolute thunderbolt.

Hillier, who had been thrown up front amid the chaos of Howard's withdrawal, responded in terrific fashion by rifling an unstoppable effort into the roof of Fettis' net from 20 yards for his first Football League goal. Resolute York responded with a John Fielding header that crashed against the bar, but Lee Mansell and George both went close to netting a third goal and giving their supporters a less anxious wait for maximum points during nine minutes and 25 seconds of injury-time.

Joe Kinnear's verdict



It was a ding-dong battle and had a bit of everything in it – everything that is good and bad in the game. We were forced into a rearguard action at times and they were a bit unfortunate after hitting the woodwork twice but we could have been 3-0 up in the first 20 minutes before they scored.

Liam George had two good opportunities and hit one over the bar from only a few feet out. Both sides kept at it and were committed to trying to win the game. The bottom line is that we got three points and we are getting to the stage where we want to start putting some distance between ourselves and the rest of the league.