

Leaders Luton toppled

01/02

By Bill Cole

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LUTON manager Joe Kinnear was quick to defend French winger Jean-Louis Valois after his side lost their unbeaten home record and the leadership of Division Three to Rochdale.

Valois has been a sensation since joining Luton last month, but after scoring three spectacular long-range goals in as many games the winger was decidedly off-colour at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

But Kinnear blamed the failure of his strikers and an outstanding performance from visiting goalkeeper Marcus Hahnenmann rather than Valois.

"In tight games like that, you must take your chances and we didn't," he said. "The expectation level is high for Valois and with the standards he has got you expect a little bit more. But he's only human and he proved that."

Rochdale moved to the top of the division thanks to on-loan striker Paul Wheatcroft, who scored the only goal of the game in the 39th minute.

The youngster, who is on the books of Premiership Bolton Wanderers, pounced after goalkeeper Carl Emberson had parried Tony Ford's initial effort.

American goalkeeper Hahnenmann produced a string of fine second-half saves as free-scoring Luton drew a blank in the league for the first time this season.

Luton were also left to rue the presence of Richard Jobson, who headed off the line from Kevin Nicholls.

Delighted Rochdale manager Steve Parkin said: "Marcus may be a bit eccentric but he's a magnificent keeper and he did his job well."

Luton Town: Emberson; Hillier, Perrett, (Boyce 45, Fotiadis 89), Coyne, Taylor; Brkovic (Forbes 45), Spring, Nicholls, Valois; Howard, Crowe. **Subs:** Ovendale, Dryden. **Booked:** Crowe, Nicholls.

Rochdale: Hahnenmann; Evans, Griffiths, Jobson, McAuley; Ford (Flitcroft 80), Jones, Oliver, Doughty; Platt, Wheatcroft (Townson).

Subs: Gilks, Bayliss, Durkan.

Booked: Griffiths. **Goal:** Wheatcroft (39).

Referee: S Tomlin (Sussex).