

Joe: We won't be cooling it

HATTERS boss Joe Kinnear will not be telling his players to "cool it" despite Ian Hillier becoming the club's sixth player to miss a game through suspension this season.

Hillier is banned for Saturday's home game with Hartlepool after his sending off in the away game against the north-east side.

Kevin Nicholls, Paul Hughes, Chris Coyne, Steve Howard and Matthew Taylor have also served suspensions this year.

All six players have been punished for late challenges and the Hatters have now racked up 66 yellow and four red cards this campaign.

But Kinnear is determined not to lose his side's competitive edge

and said: "Some of the referees' decisions have been nothing short of criminal and I do not like to take the element of tackling out of a game so I have not told my players to cool it. I want them to stick their foot in because I do not want them to drop off and give the opposition time and space to hurt us.

"But at the same time there's an art to tackling and, unfortunately, Ian Hillier went to ground at Hartlepool and got a second yellow card for intent."

Skipper Peter Holmes scored the Hatters reserves' goal in a 1-0 win over Swindon.

Crystal Palace striker Andrew Martin and French defender Oliver Bogaczyk played as trialists in that match but have since been released.

match facts

● **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, David Bayliss, Chris Coyne (Russell Perrett, 12), Matthew Taylor, Ahmet Brkovic, Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring (Peter Holmes, 46), Jean-Louis Valois (Ian Hillier, 76), Steve Howard, Dean Crowe. Subs not used: Carl Emberson, Adrian Forbes.

● **RUSHDEN & DIAMONDS:** Billy Turley, Andrew Sambrook, Mark Peters, Barry Hunter, Paul Underwood, Paul

Hall, Gary Butterworth, Richie Hanlon (Michael McElhatton, 86), Andrew Burgess, Duane Darby (Scott Partridge, 58), Onandi Lowe. Subs not used: Tony Pennock, Gary Setchell, Jon Brady.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 3 Rushden 6

● **Off target:** Luton 6 Rushden 7

● **Corners:** Luton 4 Rushden 5.

● **Top Hatter:** David Bayliss – tough and determined display.



AFTER EIGHTH: A flying Ahmet Brkovic and Kevin Nicholls congratulate Dean Crowe on his eighth goal.

Let's Crowe about Dean

DEADLY Dean Crowe's eighth goal in 11 starts secured victory against Rushden and Diamonds on Saturday and illustrated his priceless contribution to the Hatters' promotion push.

Joe Kinnear's men moved up to second place after beating Rushden but, without Crowe's goals, Luton would now be 12 points adrift of leaders Plymouth Argyle and sitting in sixth spot.

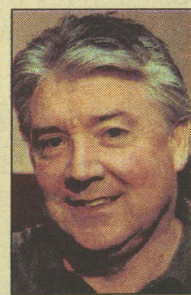
Crowe's appearance on the scoresheet has meant the difference between draws and wins against Rushden, Hartlepool and Halifax Town this season.

His goals in those matches have earned the Hatters six crucial points – a tremendous haul from a player who Kinnear snapped up on a free transfer from Stoke.



PRICELESS: Dean Crowe earns his side more league points.

Kinnear's view



I was delighted to get three points and it does not matter how you get them. They worked extremely hard and pushed four up against us in the second-half but our defence was tremendous and Russell Perrett did extremely well coming back. He showed the advantage of having quality subs. In the first-half I thought we could have added to our goal because we got behind their left back to whip in some great crosses but nobody was on the end of them

Saturday's effort also saw Crowe forge ahead of long-term injury casualty Carl Griffiths at the top of the Hatters' scoring charts.

Griffiths' goals had earned Luton four points before he handed the scoring baton over to Crowe after a serious leg injury in September.

But Saturday's victory owed as much to resilient home defending as Crowe's crucial strike.

David Bayliss, Russell Perrett and Emmerson Boyce were all resolute against a powerful Rushden strike force of Onandi Lowe and Duane Darby.

Bayliss impressed in his first Kenilworth Road start after enjoying a solid debut seven days earlier at Hartlepool.

Now might be the time to splash out on a spot of Christmas shopping but Hatters boss Kinnear appears to have picked up the kind of bargain normally reserved for the January sales.

Bayliss' introduction to the Hatters' defence after a free transfer switch from Rochdale has been a comfortable one and his presence has given Perrett and Chris Coyne serious competition for their places.

Substitute Perrett made an uncompromising return to the side after a month sidelined with injury.

He replaced Coyne who, just hours after becoming a father, collided with team-mate

Ahmet Brkovic and limped out of the action on 12 minutes. Mark Ovendale also turned in a reliable performance during his second match since dislodging Carl Emberson from the number one spot and was certainly the busier of Saturday's two goalkeepers.

Rushden's Billy Turley only made two saves all afternoon. Both of those were comfortable stops from weak efforts by Kevin Nicholls and Brkovic as the Hatters managed just three shots on target for the second successive game.

That statistic may cause some concern for Kinnear although a tally of three goals from six on-target efforts is reason for encouragement.

A very slow start to the game saw Kenilworth Road's second biggest crowd of the season wait 14 minutes for the game's first shot and 28 minutes for the first corner.

The first chance of the afternoon was Richie Hanlon's harmless low drive that was easily gathered by Ovendale.

But, moments later, Gary Butterworth went closer, out-jumping Boyce and heading

wide after the dangerous Paul Hall had skipped past Matthew Taylor on the right-wing.

On-loan Jamaican international Lowe then headed off target from a cross by ex-Luton schoolboy player Andy Burgess.

The Hatters' first goal attempt arrived on the half-hour mark and nearly gave the home side a spectacular lead.

French winger Jean-Louis Valois ghosted in from the right flank and unleashed a typically powerful 30-yard drive with his left foot that beat Turley but flashed wide.

Three minutes later, the Hatters were in front when Matthew Spring and Taylor combined to release Steve Howard, whose firm low cross was turned against his own post by Rushden skipper Paul Underwood.

Brkovic was first to the rebound and his mis-hit shot was turned in by Crowe from close range.

It was the predatory forward's fifth goal from inside the six-yard box for Luton, enhancing his reputation as a player with the valuable knack

of being in the right place at the right time.

Taylor's poor back-pass shortly after the interval could have gifted Rushden a bizarre equaliser but the ball bounced wide after Ovendale cannoned his clearance against Lowe.

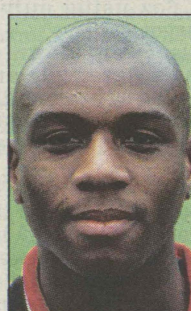
Perrett headed wide from Nicholls' cross on 54 minutes but the enforced withdrawal of an injured Spring from the Hatters' midfield at the break and the second-half introduction of lively Rushden substitute Scott Partridge spurred the visitors on.

Ovendale pushed over a firm shot from the impressive Partridge on the hour after the Diamonds striker had turned Boyce in the penalty box.

The Hatters' keeper then saved low efforts from Burgess and Partridge before Brkovic had strong appeals for a penalty turned down by referee Paul Danson despite being flattened in the visitors box on 81 minutes.

Butterworth wasted his side's best chance of a point two minutes later when he shot woefully wide with only an exposed Ovendale to beat.

player watch



EMMERSON BOYCE
THIS week the spotlight falls on Hatters' 22-year-old right-back Emmerson Boyce...
● **Shots:** 0
● **Passes to own player:** 7
● **Passes to opposition:** 4
● **Crosses to own player:** 2
● **Crosses to opposition:** 2
● **Pass completion rate:** 60%
● **Dribble ball retained:** 3
● **Dribble ball lost:** 1
● **Dribble completion rate:** 75%
● **Headers:** 6

● **Clearances, blocks and interceptions:** 14
● **Tackles:** 3
● **Fouls committed:** 2
● **Fouls won:** 1

● **FINAL VERDICT:** Emmerson Boyce enjoyed a game of two halves. He proved a useful attacking force before the break with some impressive surges forward and dangerous crosses and then he stood strong as the defensive side of his game was tested in the second period. His main blemish was a booking for dissent.