



Joe view

It was back to a case of giving away sloppy goals and missing a bagful of chances. The keeper was at fault for the third goal. He misjudged it coming off his line. But there's no need to lose my rag with them because they're not super-human or robots and they have got us where we are today. I'd like to win six matches on the trot and get hammered on the seventh all season because then we'd be champions. I'd also give Northampton credit. They played exceptionally well.

Kinnear not scared by horror show

JUST three days after Halloween Luton Town put on a horror show of their own at Northampton.

Joe Kinnear's men lost for the first time in eight matches as menacing home trio Jamie Forrester, Marco Gabbiadini and Derek Assamoah provided all the tricks and treats during a depressing afternoon for Hatters fans.

Forrester capitalised on some scary visitors defending to bag a brace, scoring the second after Assamoah had ghosted past a seemingly spooked Chris Coyne.

Veteran striker Gabbiadini, now 34, then capped a spellbinding performance with a long-range lob that will still be haunting French keeper Cedric Berthelin.

The Cobblers deserved their 3-0 victory although Tony Thorpe, making his first start since August, should have scored when the Hatters only trailed by two goals.

And Ahmet Brkovic, Steve Howard, Thorpe and Peter Holmes could all have grabbed consolation goals after Gabbiadini had netted Northampton's third on 50 minutes.

It was an unhappy return to Sixfields for Kinnear, whose last visit had seen him mastermind a 1-0 win during his first game as Hatters manager in February 2001. The fact that Emmer-



SPOOKED: Chris Coyne was left in the dark.

son Boyce and Matthew Spring were the only surviving members of Saturday's 16-man squad to start in the previous encounter between the two clubs illustrates how Kinnear has rung the changes since taking over as manager.

One of the first to go under Kinnear's regime was Kevan Broadhurst, who was relieved of his reserve team coaching duties at Kenilworth Road.

But Broadhurst, now Northampton's manager, ended a torrid run of four straight league defeats with a comprehensive victory over his old employers.

Forrester and Gabbiadini had failed to find the net during that losing run but both strikers seemed intent on ending their barren

spells on Saturday. Ex-Leeds striker Forrester, who rarely fails to impress against the Hatters, opened the scoring on nine minutes when he profited from Ian Hillier's failure to cut out Paul Harsley's through ball and beat Berthelin with a confident finish into the bottom corner.

Exciting Ghanaian winger Assamoah then left Coyne on his backside before feeding Gabbiadini whose low cross was swept past Berthelin by Forrester from close range with the Frenchman appearing to slip on the greasy surface.

The lively Gabbiadini went close with a curling effort as Northampton threatened to wrap the game up before half-time but Thorpe should have reduced the deficit on 32 minutes.

Howard, who was jeered and accused of being greedy by fans of his former club, released Thorpe for a clear run on goal, but the normally reliable finisher fired straight at home keeper Lee Harper.

Assamoah sent a shot whistling wide at the other end with an unmarked Forrester screaming for a cross to complete his hat-trick.

Kinnear replaced Aaron Skelton with Alan Neilson at the interval, but Gabbiadini made the points safe five minutes into the second half. The former Sunderland and Derby striker raced on to Forrester's



OUCH! Matthew Spring takes evasive action at Northampton.

Picture: GARETH OWEN

through ball and lobbed into an unguarded net from 30 yards after Berthelin had been caught in no man's land, having inexplicably charged to the edge of his penalty box.

Harper parried a Brkovic shot on 53 minutes after Thorpe's pass had given the Croatian midfielder a clear sight of goal.

Forrester then twice went close to claiming the match ball, but was denied by Berthelin's legs after stealing in behind Hillier and saw another effort brush the sidenetting having shrugged off the challenge of Boyce.

Howard's frustrating

return to Sixfields was typified by a 74th-minute header that sailed harmlessly over and Assamoah almost added to the 6ft 3in striker's misery when he accelerated into the Hatters' penalty box but shot inches wide.

Brkovic and Steve Robinson, whose contributions and distribution from the flanks had been disappointing, were withdrawn on 79 minutes with captain Kevin Nicholls given his first taste of action after missing the whole of October with an achilles problem.

Holmes was the other replacement and he could have scored twice in the closing stages. First, the 21-

year-old midfielder fired straight at Harper after the home keeper could only parry Thorpe's shot.

Then Holmes headed weakly wide from Thorpe's 88th-minute cross.

Kinnear was reluctant to criticise his players at the final whistle after their recent heroics and insisted complacency or over-confidence played no part in the team's downfall.

Strangely, five of the Hatters' six league defeats have come against sides now occupying places in the division's bottom 10 while they are unbeaten in their five meetings against teams in the top seven.

HAVE YOUR SAY: If you would like to air your views about the Hatters please get in touch. Letters to: Sports Desk, News and Gazette, Media House, 39 Upper George Street, Luton, LU1 2RD.

matchfacts

NORTHAMPTON 3 LUTON 0

● **NORTHAMPTON:** Lee Harper, Ian Sampson, John Frain (Chris Carruthers 13), Paul Harsley, Marco Gabbiadini (Richard Hope, 89), Paul Trollope, Daryl Burgess, Jamie Forrester, Derek Assamoah (Paul Rickers, 84), Christian Hargreaves, Jerry Gill. Subs not used: Nathan Abbey, Greg Lincoln.

● **HATTERS:** Cedric Berthelin, Emmer-son Boyce, Ian Hillier, Chris Coyne, Sol Davis, Steve Robinson (Peter Holmes, 79), Aaron Skelton (Alan Neilson, 46),

Matthew Spring, Ahmet Brkovic (Kevin Nicholls, 79), Steve Howard, Tony Thorpe. Subs not used: Carl Emberson, Alan Kimble.

● **Shots on target:** Northampton 5 Luton 4.

● **Off target:** Northampton 9 Luton 3.

● **Corners:** Northampton 2 Luton 5.

● **Referee:** Paul Durkin.

● **TOP HATTER:** Sol Davis - an average performance at left-back on a day that was littered by torrid displays from most other Hatters players at Sixfields.



SPOTLIGHT: Thorpe.

playerwatch

HATTERS STRIKER TONY THORPE

- Time on pitch: 90 minutes
- Shots on target: 2
- Shots off target: 0
- Blocked shots: 0
- Passes to own player: 10
- Passes to opposition: 2
- Crosses to own player: 1
- Crosses to opposition: 5
- Pass completion rate: 61.1 per cent
- Dribble ball retained: 3
- Dribble ball lost: 2

- Dribble completion rate: 60 per cent
- Tackles: 1
- Headers: 2
- Clearances, blocks and interceptions: 0
- Offsides: 1
- Free-kicks won: 1
- Free-kicks conceded: 0
- Offsides: 0
- **FINAL VERDICT:** Thorpe was

Thorpey fails to find the net

one of Luton's better performers on a sorry afternoon at Sixfields but missed a simple first-half chance to score and also hit a second effort straight at home keeper Lee Harper in the latter stages. His distribution and dribbling was generally good and he also set up chances for Peter Holmes and Ahmet Brkovic.