

Joe hopes it's all over for ref Wolstenholme

JOE KINNEAR accused referee Eddie Wolstenholme of "losing the plot" and labelled his performance "a shambles" after watching his nine-man side battle valiantly for a 0-0 draw against Queen's Park Rangers.

Wolstenholme sent off Hatters top scorer Steve Howard for a late challenge on 14 minutes and captain Kevin Nicholls followed him into the changing rooms on 50 minutes after a second bookable offence.

Both decisions were contentious and Kinnear, perhaps fortunate not to be red-carded himself after an unsavoury touchline tussle with QPR boss Ian Holloway, was not enamoured by the Lancashire official's performance.

Mr Wolstenholme also cautioned Hatters trio Tony Thorpe, Matthew Spring and Ahmet Brkovic and QPR pair Terrell Forbes and Brett Angell during a boisterous encounter that was played in front of Kenilworth Road's first sell-out crowd of the season and, by far, the most vociferous.

Kinnear, clearly, felt the occasion affected the referee's display and said afterwards: "The decision to send Steve Howard off summed up the referee's performance. With a bit of luck that will probably be his last match."

"Howard said he never touched the boy. It was possibly a yellow card but it only warranted that."

"The referee decided to do otherwise and he was a shambles. Kevin Nicholls got booked for getting head-butted after clashing with Brett Angell."

"He's clueless as to why he got that yellow card. The second one was fair enough because the boy cut across him, but the first one was ridiculous and I think the referee had lost the plot."

"I will look at the video and, if there's a reason to object as I think there will be, I will make a formal complaint. I had a long chat with the referee and he is prepared to rescind it if he thinks he's made a mistake."

"The crowd was magnificent and the whole place was buzzing with atmosphere but unfortunately we had the wrong official in charge of the game. A referee got it wrong again, as they normally do."

Despite Mr Wolstenholme's display and QPR's numerical advantage, Luton could, and should, have snatched a dramatic late victory.

Andrew Fotiadis, enduring one of his frustrating cameo appearances as a substitute, twice bore down on Simon Royce's goal in the last six minutes but failed to take either opportunity.

The 25-year-old striker then suffered the humiliation of being hauled off by an angry Kinnear just 14 minutes after replacing Thorpe.

Kinnear preferred instead to play with full-back Ian Hillier as his lone striker for the closing stages.

At the other end, French keeper Cedric Berthelin was only required to make five saves

Joe view



The defence was magnificent and the fitness level terrific. I felt that may cost us when we went down to nine but we created the best two chances. Foty only had the keeper to beat but he's hit and miss. Another striker would have won the match. I was disappointed with him and that's why he came off. Unfortunately it's the same old story and liable to happen on a regular basis.

all afternoon and his first, when it was 11 against 11, was probably his best, diving full length to keep out Tommy Williams' free-kick.

Chris Coyne forced visitors keeper Royce into an equally impressive save two minutes later.

He palmed away the Australian defender's shot from the edge of the area.

Brkovic then volleyed wide from Emmerston Boyce's cross before Howard received his marching orders.

A booking and a stern ticking off seemed the most appropriate punishment for Howard's reckless lunge at Clarke Carlisle, but Mr Wolstenholme reached immediately for his red card and the 6ft 3in striker was sent off for the first time in his Hatters career.

Nicholls was given his first caution of the afternoon six minutes later when he reacted angrily after an aerial clash with well-travelled striker Angell.

The first-half continued in a competitive nature and the half-time whistle signalled ugly scenes when Kinnear appeared to shove Holloway and the managers had to be dragged apart.

Hatters coach Mick Harford then continued the verbal spat with Holloway across the pitch and into the players tunnel.

It later emerged that Kinnear had accused Holloway of trying to get Howard sent off, which was an allegation the QPR boss strenuously denied.

Nicholls received his marching orders on 50 minutes when a clumsy stumble saw him tangle with Rangers midfielder Oliver Burgess.

Again, Mr Wolstenholme could have issued the Hatters captain with a strict warning but instead chose to brandish his red card.

Luton's nine men responded superbly to their second set-back of the match with Thorpe continuing to work selflessly alone up front and Matthew Spring compensating for Nicholls' loss with a brilliant attitude and assistance from Brkovic and Steve Robinson.



TAKE THAT: Steve Howard and Clarke Carlisle clash during Saturday's 0-0 draw. Moments later, Howard was sent off for a foul on the QPR defender. Picture: JANE SHERLOCK

The back four, superbly marshalled by Coyne, also stood firm as QPR, without a win in seven games including the 0-0 FA Cup draw at part-timers Vauxhall Motors, struggled to turn greater numbers into domination.

Callum Willock's volley flashed wide on 75 minutes after Berthelin had pushed away a Williams cross.

The former Lens keeper then made an impressive save to prevent ex-Chelsea striker Paul Furlong from converting another left-wing Williams cross.

Fotiadis' first chance to clinch a memorable

victory came on 84 minutes when he broke clear but dallied and his eventual shot was turned behind by Royce.

Moments later, he wasted a better opportunity when he lost control of the ball with only Royce to beat.

Willock, with Fotiadis departed, then missed a chance to win the game in stoppage time for a QPR, firing narrowly wide from 20 yards.

Victory would have flattered a QPR side currently occupying the final play-off spot just three points ahead of the Hatters, who have now lost just one game in 11.

matchfacts

LUTON 0 QPR 0

●HATTERS: Cedric Berthelin, Emmerston Boyce, Alan Neilson, Chris Coyne, Sol Davis, Steve Robinson, Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Ahmet Brkovic, Steve Howard, Tony Thorpe (Andrew Fotiadis, 76, Ian Hillier 90). Subs not used: Carl Emberson, Peter Holmes, Paul Hughes.

●QPR: Simon Royce, Terrell Forbes, Clarke Carlisle, Danny Shittu, Steve Palmer, Tommy Williams, Marc Bircham, Oliver Burgess, Callum Willock, Andy Thomson (Paul Furlong,

57), Brett Angell (Kevin Gallen, 57, Dennis Oli, 71). Subs not used: Gino Padula, Nick Culpin.

●Shots on target: Luton 2 QPR 5.

●Off target: Luton 5 QPR 10.

●Corners: Luton 10 QPR 5.

●Referee: Eddie Wolstenholme (Lancashire).

●TOP HATTER: Chris Coyne - the Australian defender stood firm with a magnificent aerial display at the heart of the Hatters defence. He also had one of his side's two shots on target.



SPOTLIGHT: Spring.

playerwatch

MIDFIELDER MATTHEW SPRING IN THE SPOTLIGHT...

- Time on pitch: 90 minutes
- Shots on target: 0
- Shots off target: 1
- Blocked shots: 2
- Passes to own player: 21
- Passes to opposition: 4
- Crosses to own player: 0
- Crosses to opposition: 2
- Pass completion rate: 77.8 per cent
- Dribble ball retained: 2
- Dribble ball lost: 1

Spring shines for nine men

- Dribble completion rate: 66.6 per cent
- Tackles: 6
- Headers: 6
- Clearances, blocks and interceptions: 4
- Offsides: 0
- Free-kicks won: 0
- Free-kicks conceded: 2
- Bookings: 1
- FINAL VERDICT: Spring was

one of the Hatters' chief heroes against QPR. He shone after 50th-minute red card, compensating for the captain's loss with a hard-working display. Thorpe was often his only attacking outlet but Spring's high pass completion rate showed a refusal to waste possession.