



FOR PETE'S SAKE: Another Hatters first-half chance goes begging as former Watford full-back Peter Kennedy prevents Northern Ireland international team-mate Steve Robinson from getting in a shot on goal. Nathan Ellington later punished the Hatters with a two-goal blast and sub Mike Flynn sealed a 3-0 win.

Picture: GARETH OWEN



Hatters miss sidelined 12

HATTERS boss Joe Kinnear watched his side bow out of the FA Cup at Wigan and then suggested he could have fielded a better team from the players he was deprived of for Saturday's second round tie.

A combination of injury, suspension and boardroom prudence cost Kinnear the services of 12 senior professionals at the JJB Stadium and, despite a sluggish start, the Division Two table-toppers ran out comfortable 3-0 winners.

The Hatters manager's preparation for the game were not helped when the club's directors vetoed a long-term contract for first-choice keeper Cedric Berthelin in midweek. Mark Ovendale, who Kinnear indicated afterwards would have replaced the departed Frenchman, was missing with flu so Carl Emberson played in goal despite being Kinnear's least-preferred option.

Teenage keeper Robert Beckwith, 18, was called on to the first team bench for the first time and Kinnear could have been forgiven for believing he was in charge of a creche rather than a professional football club as he also sat alongside baby-faced duo Matthew Judge and Kevin Foley.

All three players were fast-tracked from the youth team to FA Cup duty so the Hatters could name a 16-man squad, but Judge was used as a second-half substitute when Kinnear decided much-maligned striker Andrew Fotiadis had "run out of puff" after playing for 69 minutes as the visitors' sole striker.



Joe view

We did well in the first half but they scored against the run of play and I was not happy with the way we conceded goals. It was not a shameful disappointment and we did well to a point but if we'd had six different players we'd have had a chance of winning. They only came alive when the second goal went in and then we left holes because we were chasing. When we're back here in March we'll have a better side and I'd fancy us to get a result.

The Hatters boss later pointed out that unavailable front men Steve Howard, Tony Thorpe, Dean Crowe, Adrian Forbes and, perhaps, Carl Griffiths, would normally be selected ahead of Fotiadis.

Instead, the Hatters were left chasing the game for the last quarter with an unlikely front four of Steve Robinson, Judge, Ahmet Brkovic and Emmerson Boyce.

First-choice defenders Russell Perrett and Sol Davis were also missing, as was suspended skipper Kevin Nicholls, David Bayliss and Aaron Skelton.

Kinnear's side that started Saturday's game cost just £125,000 with only Chris Coyne, Peter Holmes and Robinson commanding transfer fees.

Wigan's record signing Nathan Ellington cost more than NINE times that amount and Kinnear was quick to highlight the financial disparity between the two clubs after watching the "Duke" score his side's first two goals.

"Money talks," the Hatters boss said ruefully. "I would not mind having Mr JJB on board. They have spent fortunes, as have Cardiff, and that's why they are top of the league."

But Kinnear also emphasised that his strongest side can be a match for both of Division Two's big-spending powers, as has been proven with draws in the league this season that could quite easily have been victories.

He said: "We had to bring three kids with us and our top four strikers were out. I could have fielded a side of missing players with more pace, strength and power."

Saturday's comprehensive exit could have been avoided, however, if the depleted Hatters had capitalised on a lethargic beginning to the game by Wigan and taken their early chances.

The Hatters made a hard-working start to the game with Kinnear's 4-5-1 formation looking well-organised and denying Wigan space in mid-

field. Paul Jewell's team appeared a little jaded after their Worthington Cup exertions on Wednesday when they dumped Premiership Fulham out of the competition and struggled to raise their game in front of a ridiculously paltry crowd.

Only 4,544 bothered to turn up for the game and the sparsely-populated super stadium created a low-key atmosphere that must have been the FA Cup's worst over the weekend.

Coyne's tame 19th-minute header, easily saved by John Filan, was the first goal attempt of the game after an Alan Kimble cross.

But Croatian midfielder Brkovic had a better opportunity five minutes later, only for his recent free-scoring form to desert him and a powder-puff shot from 10 yards was comfortably saved by Filan.

Holmes then wasted the Hatters' best chance to go in front.

The 22-year-old midfielder cleverly created the space for a shot by lifting the ball over the head of home captain Matthew Jackson, but then failed to make a clean contact with his volley and the ball bobbed across the face of goal from six yards out.

Ellington was much more clinical at the other end on 37 minutes when he scored from Wigan's first shot of the match.

Coyne committed himself as Ellington received the ball and turned on the edge of the Hatters box and the former Bristol Rovers striker then sidestepped a challenge from Alan Neilson before firing into Emberson's bottom right-hand corner.

Right-back Boyce almost responded immediately for the visitors, but

his terrific run into the Wigan penalty box culminated in a left-footed shot that was turned around the post by Filan.

The Australian keeper also stopped a Spring volley from 12 yards two minutes after half-time and watched Brkovic's header go wide from Robinson's cross before Ellington netted his second on the counter attack.

Gary Teale's pass sailed over Kimble's head and found the Duke who finished in majestic fashion, rifling in a powerful 20-yard drive past the back-tracking Emberson whose positioning, allied by an inviting bounce off a pitch churned up by rugby league, influenced the confident 15-goal striker's decision to shoot early.

Kinnear reacted by dragging off Holmes and Fotiadis, who had both faded after promising starts, with Judge and Ian Hillier their replacements.

Judge formed an unusual attacking alliance with Robinson, Brkovic and Boyce as the Hatters switched to a 4-2-4 formation.

But the four-pronged strikeforce failed to threaten Filan in the closing stages and Tony Dinning should have scored a third goal for Wigan on 72 minutes when he lifted the ball over the bar from just five yards.

Emberson then turned behind a shot from the lively Teale to give the home side their first and only corner on 82 minutes before Mike Flynn completed the scoring.

Flynn escaped marker Neilson to meet Nicky Eaden's right-wing free-kick with a header that sailed over Emberson.

matchfacts

WIGAN 3 LUTONTOWN 0

●WIGAN: John Filan, Nicky Eaden, Leighton Baines, Ian Breckin, Matt Jackson, Scott Green (Paul Mitchell, 55), Tony Dinning, Jason Jarrett, Peter Kennedy (Gary Teale, 56), Nathan Ellington, Neil Roberts (Mike Flynn, 81). Subs not used: Dave Beasant, Ged Brannan.

●HATTERS: Carl Emberson, Emmerson Boyce, Alan Neilson, Chris Coyne, Alan Kimble, Steve Robinson, Paul Hughes, Matthew Spring, Peter Holmes (Ian Hillier, 68), Ahmet

Brkovic, Andrew Fotiadis (Matthew Judge, 69). Subs not used: Rob Beckwith, Kevin Foley, Lee Mansell.

●Shots on target: Wigan 4 Luton 4.
●Off target: Wigan 4 Luton 5.
●Corners: Wigan 1 Luton 4.
●Referee: H Webb.

●TOP HATTER: Emmerson Boyce – continues to look the Hatters' most natural wide player and is becoming more confident with his forward forays. Getting closer and closer to scoring his first goal of the season and is improving all the time.



BOOKED: Matt Judge.

playerwatch

LEFTBACK ALAN KIMBLE IS IN THE SPOTLIGHT...

●Time on pitch: 90 minutes
●Shots on target: 0
●Shots off target: 0
●Blocked shots: 0
●Passes to own player: 26
●Passes to opposition: 13
●Crosses to own player: 3
●Crosses to opposition: 6
●Pass completion rate: 60.4 per cent
●Dribble ball retained: 0
●Dribble ball lost: 0

Kimble OK as Davis deputy

●Dribble completion rate: 0 per cent
●Tackles: 4
●Headers: 15
●Clearances, blocks and interceptions: 6
●Offsides: 0
●Free-kicks won: 1
●Free-kicks conceded: 0
●Bookings: 0
●FINAL VERDICT: Kimble proved

an adequate replacement for regular left-back Sol Davis. The 36-year-old defender delivered a healthy nine crosses although his distribution was erratic at times. Kimble did not concede any free kicks and lacks Davis aggression. He proved useful in the air but was caught out for Ellington's second goal.