

Foty earns rare praise

ANDREW FOTIADIS was praised for his first-half performance against Colchester but told that he faded after the break.

Hatters boss Joe Kinnear, who has been a regular critic of Fotiadis this season, said: "He got the message in the first-half when he was always a threat but it did not continue into the second-half."

"I put Emmerson Boyce up there because the ball was coming back too easily."

"I also think Steve Howard and Tony Thorpe would have bagged three goals each with the chances we had."

"They caught us on the right day but we should have beaten them even with a poor strikeforce."

Kinnear also believed that fans who booed left-back Alan Kimble were a "bit harsh" in their criticism.

He said: "He did well in the first-half although he did not use the ball well."

"I think it was frustration on the part of the punters but it was a bit harsh."

Kimble is likely to continue at left-back against Bristol City on Saturday with Sol Davis still struggling to recover from a hamstring injury.

Both Hatters junior sides suffered defeats at the weekend.

The under 19s went down 1-0 at Oxford, while the under 17s were beaten 1-0 at home to Leyton Orient.



ON THE RUN: Hatters goalscorer Andrew Fotiadis escapes his Colchester markers.

Picture: JOANNA CROSS

Silent night from Joe

HATTERS boss Joe Kinnear decided to hold his tongue after watching his players lose 2-1 against Colchester on Saturday.

A frustrated Kinnear chose not to attend the post-match press conference, preferring instead to keep his immediate thoughts to himself at the end of a difficult week at Kenilworth Road.

Three defeats in seven days, a crippling injury crisis and a cautious board that will not provide any more money for new players have left Kinnear contemplating Christmas with all the enthusiasm of Ebenezer Scrooge.

The club's exits from the FA Cup and LDV Vans Trophy during a depressing week have also left Luton's directors counting the pennies as the prospects of a money-spinning cup tie against a Premiership club and a lucrative day out at the Millennium Stadium both vanished.

Midfield play-maker Matthew Spring's 15th-minute ankle injury after a meaty challenge against Colchester added to Kinnear's woe and the growing list of patients for new physio Lee Taylor.

Spring's injury leaves Kinnear facing the possibility of missing 12 senior players for a tough Christmas programme that kicks off with fixtures against high-flyers Bristol City and Cardiff.

Kinnear will, at least, be able to



Kinnear view

I was so disappointed, not by the effort we put in, but by our game in both boxes. We missed goals for fun in the first-half and the game should have been dead and buried but then we threw two in. Even without playing well we should have got three points. Robinson and Brkovic both missed good chances and another keeper has come here and finished man of the match. Losing Springy was also a blow. He could have nicked us a goal.

welcome Steve Howard back from suspension.

Howard has been absent for each of the Hatters' demoralising three defeats and will be an automatic selection at Ashton Gate on Saturday.

Andrew Fotiadis filled in for Howard on Saturday and, despite Kinnear's well-publicised reservations about the much-maligned striker, he responded by firing the Hatters into a first-half lead.

But the game's pivotal moment arrived in the sixth minute of injury time after a costly complaint by home midfielder Steve Robinson.

Santa Claus was paraded around the pitch at Kenilworth Road on Saturday, dishing out mince pies, and Robinson joined in the festive spirit by presenting Colchester with a gift-wrapped opportunity to level the scores seconds before the interval.

The Northern Ireland international midfielder showed dissent after being shown a yellow card for a foul on Karl Duguid and referee Mark Cowburn then correctly applied the letter of the law by moving the ball 10 yards to the edge of the Hatters' penalty box.

Duguid then executed further punishment by curling his effort over an ineffective wall, boasting pint-sized duo Robinson and Dean Crowe, and past Mark Ovendale, who did not move as the ball found his top left-hand corner.

That goal turned the whole complexion of a game that the Hatters had, until that point, been dominating and a poor second-half from the home team saw Colchester pinch all three points with a Dean Morgan header.

The visitors failed to create a sin-

gle chance from open play in the first-half and long spells of possession for the Hatters elicited a chorus of 'Olés' from the expectant home crowd.

But the level of Kinnear's side's dominance was not reflected on the scoresheet, mainly due to an inspirational first-half performance from Colchester's over-worked keeper Simon Brown.

Crowe squandered the Hatters' first good opportunity of the afternoon by dragging a fifth-minute shot wide after Emmerson Boyce's clever back-heel.

But Brown then made a brilliant finger-tip save to keep out Robinson's close-range header.

He then stuck out a leg to save from Robinson on 30 minutes and Ahmet Brkovic's follow-up effort struck Colchester defender Mark Warren before clearing the crossbar.

Brown was eventually beaten on 34 minutes by Fotiadis, who collected the ball after a strong run by Boyce and fired confidently into the Colchester keeper's bottom left-hand corner from 15 yards.

Kinnear's main criticism of Fotiadis this season has been his wasteful finishing, but Saturday's strike was a clinical effort and his record of five goals in nine starts is a better goals per game ratio than any other player at the club.

Sadly, for the Hatters, Duguid who, like Fotiadis, was born in nearby Hitchin, equalised in the time added on for Spring's injury.

Crowe missed another good

chance on 53 minutes when he failed to test Brown from close range, heading Robinson's low cross away from goal instead.

Ovendale then spared Alan Neilson's blushes at the other end when he charged off his line to save at the feet of Kevin Rapley after the Hatters defender's sloppy back-pass.

But the Hatters keeper could not pull off a repeat performance on 58 minutes when Chris Coyne's clearance was charged down and the loose ball broke to Rapley.

This time, the Colchester striker skipped past Ovendale and crossed for Morgan, who headed into the unguarded goal.

Kinnear immediately reverted to a three-pronged strikeforce with Robinson playing as an out-and-out right winger and Fotiadis moved to the left flank.

When that switch brought few rewards Boyce was thrown up front for the last quarter of an hour, but Kevin Nicholls' inswinging corner that hit the bar and two long-range drives by Coyne that were well saved by Brown were the nearest Luton came to a point.

Sections of the disgruntled home crowd chose to boo 36-year-old defender Alan Kimble for the last half-hour.

He was unfortunate to be singled out during a collectively lacklustre second-half display that saw the Hatters taste defeat in the league at home for the first time since September.

matchfacts

LUTON 1 COLCHESTER 2

●HATTERS: Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, Alan Neilson, Chris Coyne, Alan Kimble, Steve Robinson, Matthew Spring (Paul Hughes, 15), Kevin Nicholls, Ahmet Brkovic, Andrew Fotiadis, Dean Crowe. Subs not used: Ian Hillier, Peter Holmes, Lee Mansell, Carl Emberson.
●COLCHESTER UNITED: Simon Brown, Mark Warren (Pat Baldwin, 46), Scott Fitzgerald, Alan White, Karl Duguid, Bobby Bowry, Sam Stockley, Kem Izzet, Micky Stockwell

(Adrian Coote, 61), Dean Morgan, Kevin Rapley (Thomas Pinault, 90). Subs not used: Richard McKinney, Simon Atangana.
●Shots on target: Luton 10 Colchester 3.
●Off target: Luton 5 Colchester 2.
●Corners: Luton 9 Colchester 2.
●Referee: Mark Cowburn (Lancashire).
●TOP HATTER: Fotiadis - reacted well to Joe Kinnear's criticism with a goal and good first-half. Faded, like rest of team, after the break.

playerwatch



NO GO, DEANO: Hatters striker Crowe is denied during Saturday's game against Colchester.

KEEPER MARK OVENDALE IS IN THE SPOTLIGHT...

●Time on pitch: 90 minutes
●Shots at his goal: 3
●Shots saved: 1
●Save/shot ratio: 33.3 per cent
●Kicks to own player: 16
●Kicks to opposition: 18
●Kick completion rate: 47.1 per cent
●Throws to own player: 1
●Throws to opposition: 0
●Throw completion rate: 100 per cent

●Crosses caught: 3
●Crosses punched: 2
●Crosses dropped: 0
●FINAL VERDICT: Ovendale will be disappointed to stop just one of the three shots on his goal, especially Colchester's equaliser when he appeared static in his attempt to keep out Karl Duguid's free-kick. But he dealt confidently with crosses and his kicking was reliable with any failure to find team-mates mostly due to the absence of Steve Howard rather than inaccuracy.