

Davis off in injury time panto-monium

SOL Davis was sent off deep into injury time as battling Luton threw away a deserved win against high-flying Bristol City.

Leading from a 53rd minute Steve Howard goal on his return after three-match suspension, the ten-man Hatters conceded the equaliser in the sixth minute of added time.

Apart from the sending-off, Luton had five other players booked and not surprisingly manager Joe Kinnear declined to comment after the game on referee Malcolm Cooper's performance.

But my view from the press box was that Mr Cooper was little short of shocking, booking players for the tiniest of indiscretions. Sadly, he contrived to strangle the lifeblood out of the game in front of over 14,000 fans at Ashton Gate.

Carl Emberson was recalled in goal in place of Mark Ovendale, who dropped to the bench, and a strapped-up Davis passed a late fitness test to reclaim his left back spot.

With no Kevin Nicholls nor Matthew Spring through injury, Kinnear reverted to a 4-3-3 formation with striker Tony Thorpe being made captain on his return to the club he left in the summer.

Luton went into the game with a good pedigree against top-half sides on the road, beating Oldham, Crewe and Tranmere Rovers in recent weeks.

City lived up to their pre-match billing of the division's form team and in winger Scott Murray they had one of the form players with 17 goals to his name already this season bringing him an international call-up for Scotland.

It was no surprise Murray created the first and best chance of a lacklustre half. His right wing dribble left Ahmet Brkovic and Davis trailing in his wake. His pinpoint cross found striker Lee Peacock in the box, whose prodded shot hit the post with Emberson well beaten.

Luton's best chance in the first 45 minutes came from a Davis corner. In a busy penalty area, Alan Neilson managed to find room to rise unchallenged but his header went just over the bar.

For the most part Luton prevented City from creating any real chances but the gulf between them and Kinnear's patched-up side was all too evident.

Time and time again possession was lost and only desperate defending a minute from the break kept them level. Neilson's sloppy back-pass gave Lee Peacock a one-on-one with Emberson but a last-ditch sliding tackle from Coyne blocked the goalbound effort.

Before the half was over a Coyne free kick from 30 yards whistled just wide.

Dean Crowe was isolated on the right for large parts of the half and Thorpe, whose every touch was greeted with a crescendo of boos, did not look match fit.

Luton went in from the first half battered and bruised but came off the ropes in the second half to deliver City a sucker punch on 53 minutes.

In the best move of the match, Crowe picked up the ball on the halfway line and after a powerful touchline run gave the ball to Thorpe in the penalty area.

He dinked the ball into the path of the onrushing Steve Robinson, who glanced the ball to an unmarked Howard on the edge of the six-yard to finish with aplomb.

It was no more than the Hatters deserved for a much-improved start to the second half. Luton's defensive wall stood firm without looking troubled but was rocked in the 75th minute when City captain Tommy Docherty thundered a 25-yard volley against the crossbar.

Luton escaped that scare as they did six min-



■ Overjoyed: Steve Howard is over the moon at his goal on his return a three-match ban

utes later when Peacock had the ball in the back of the net. He bundled in the ball after a header from ex-Watford striker Peter Beadle had hit the bar but the effort was ruled offside.

With 90 minutes on the clock to the shock of Luton fans and the delight of City, referee Cooper added five minutes of injury time – it was enough time for a dramatic finale.

Davis was dismissed for elbowing Murray in the face, frustration perhaps for a torrid afternoon from the Scotsman. It triggered off an incredible 20-man brawl as Davis threatened to dish out more of the same to Docherty.

Down to ten men, Luton looked to have

escaped from Ashton Gate with all the points after Coyne blocked a Liam Rosenior shot on the line but it was not to be.

With the last kick of the game City equalised through Beadle's side-foot volley from 15 yards, following Luton's inability to deal with a corner.

Kinnear said afterwards: "I am absolutely gutted. I feel cheated. Where did he find that amount of injury time? However, I was delighted with the team's performance."

Kinnear would not be drawn on discussing the referee but looked furious at the end of the game as he rushed up to have words with the official.



MATCH FACTS



LUTON TOWN (4-3-3): Emberson; Boyce, Neilson (Hillier 71m), Coyne, Davis; Robinson, Hughes, Brkovic; Howard, Crowe, Thorpe (Kimble 90)
Subs not used: Ovendale, Mansell, Fotiadis

Referee: M A Cooper (West Midlands)

GOALSCORERS:
Bristol City: Beadle (90)
Luton: Howard (53)

SHOTS ON TARGET
Bristol City: 5
Luton: 3

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Bristol City: 6
Luton: 3

CORNERS
Bristol City: 13
Luton: 3

OFFSIDE
Bristol City: 3
Luton: 2

BOOKINGS
Bristol City: Roberts (25)
Luton: Thorpe (26), Hughes (37), Howard (39), Emberson (67), Brkovic (75)
SENDING-OFF
Davis (90)

ATTENDANCE: 14,057

HATTERS' STAR MAN: CHRIS COYNE

Yet another outstanding display in the heart of the defence

Division Two results

Barnsley	0	Mansfield	1
Blackpool	3	Peterborough	0
Bristol City	1	LUTON	1
Cheltenham	0	Wycombe	0
Chesterfield	0	Oldham	1
Port Vale	1	Plymouth	2
QPR	1	Brentford	1
Swindon	1	Crewe	3
Tranmere	2	Notts County	2
Wigan	1	Huddersfield	0

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	22	15	5	2	37	13	50
Cardiff	22	14	4	4	37	18	46
Bristol City	22	14	3	5	46	26	45
Oldham	22	12	6	4	35	16	42
Crewe	22	12	5	5	35	18	41
Brentford	22	9	6	7	28	25	33
QPR	22	8	7	7	29	26	31
Luton	22	8	7	7	32	30	31
Blackpool	22	9	4	9	28	32	31
Tranmere	22	9	4	9	28	35	31
Chesterfield	22	9	3	10	18	24	30
Plymouth	22	7	8	7	30	30	29
Stockport	22	8	3	11	30	31	27
Wycombe	22	7	6	9	29	31	27
Port Vale	22	7	5	10	27	35	26
Colchester	22	6	7	9	22	29	25
Northampton	22	7	4	11	21	33	25
Swindon	22	6	6	10	26	34	24
Barnsley	22	6	6	10	24	33	24
Notts County	22	4	11	7	32	33	23
Cheltenham	22	5	7	10	20	29	22
Peterborough	22	5	6	11	26	33	21
Huddersfield	22	5	6	11	17	26	21
Mansfield	22	6	3	13	37	53	21

■ Sol Davis gets his marching orders sparking a 20-man brawl in injury time of the game at Bristol City