

Thorpe cracks Cardiff resolve

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By Mike Berry

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CARDIFF CITY	0

RAISING the stakes is starting to suit Luton, for whom a merited victory against promotion-chasing Cardiff made it four points out of six and embellished their record of not having lost to any of the teams in the top 10.

A goalless deadlock at Cardiff in August launched Luton's push to reach the play-offs after their elevation to Division Two had yielded four straight defeats, and for a long time this return fixture implausibly seemed set to mirror that scoreline.

Joe Kinnear's bold tactic of playing three in attack, and encouraging his midfield players to support them at every opportunity, asked some serious questions of Cardiff's credentials for automatic promotion.

Lennie Lawrence, given a predictably mixed welcome at the club where he was in charge between 1995 and 2000, saw his side overrun at times but Cardiff held out, despite the traffic becoming inexorably one-way.

However, just as Luton's luck appeared to have run dry, they finally got their just deserts in the last 10 minutes.

Tony Thorpe atoned for a series of misses by drilling in the first, and Steve Howard grabbed a second at the death with a volley that thundered in under the angle.

Thorpe said: "We wanted it more than them, and both Steve Howard and myself could have had the match ball with all the chances we created."

Both goalkeepers earned their corn in a first half of thrust and counter-thrust. Luton's Carl Emberson saved well from Peter Thorne, and Neil Alexander, in the Cardiff goal, touched over a header from Howard before thwarting Dean Crowe early in the second period. Luton, who had last won at home in the league on Oct 12, saw several goal-line clearances, and an outstretched leg when Thorpe had a simple tap-in, add to the frustration before justice was finally done.

Lawrence moaned: "That is the most chances we have conceded in any one game since I came to the club, and we don't look right at the back."

Luton (4-3-3): Emberson; Boyce, Hillier, Coyne, Kimble; Hughes, Robinson, Brkovic; Crowe, Thorpe, Howard. **Subs:** Ovendale (g), Fotiadis, Mansell, Osborn, Deeney.

Cardiff (4-3-1-2): Alexander, Weston, Prior, Zhiyi (Bowen 85), Barker; Boland, Kavanagh, Legg; Campbell (Fortune-West 75); Earnshaw, Thorne. **Subs:** Croft, Maxwell, Margetson (g).

Booked: Kavanagh, Barker, Weston, Prior, Boland.

Referee: P Armstrong (Berkshire).