



02/03



■ Springboard: Matthew Spring's magical left foot seals the game for Luton at Wycombe Wanderers

Matt's goal floors woeful Wanderers

THE Hatters won a messy, hard fought game that will be remembered for the crucial three points rather than anything quality football.

There was never any doubting the winners as Luton completed their first double of the season through Matthew Spring's precise finish.

Manager Joe Kinnear gave a huge vote of confidence to Carl Emberson in goal after last week's sending-off at Barnsley.

Missing from that game but back yesterday was right back Emberson Boyce and also returning from injury was Ahment Brkovic, who started on the bench.

Luton beat Wycombe 2-1 in the last game of 2002, but since then they had been unbeaten in four league games, including a 5-0 win at Northampton.

A scrappy first half contained very little quality football from either side. Luton's passing and movement promised a lot early on but it lacked the finishing touch.

Despite plenty of corners and the majority of play, only a well hit 25-yard drive on 40 minutes from Steve Howard threatened the Wycombe goal.

Wycombe gave Emberson even less to worry about with not a single shot on target.

The real talking point of the opening 45 minutes was referee Clive Wilkes' decision to dish out five yellow cards.

From the outset Luton were too quick for Wycome but found themselves hindered by constant niggly fouls. The referee had no other choice but to keep stopping the game, preventing any sort of rhythm.

Wycombe accounted for three of

the cautions and veteran midfielder Steve Brown was lucky not to see red after a crude two-footed lunge on Spring.

Luton could feel aggrieved with Howard's caution as he went for a 50-50 ball with goalkeeper Frank Talia. It seemed a perfectly fair challenge but while the striker

walked away, Talia rolled around in theatrical fashion.

Even though no blood was evident, the goalkeeper nevertheless had his head swathed in bandages.

Luton took the lead on 50 minutes with the first real chance of the game for either side.

A Paul Hughes overhead kick

reached Tony Thorpe in the box. Unfortunately for Thorpe – whose dribbling runs were a highlight throughout the game – found himself crowded out by defenders five yards from goal. He managed to lay the ball left to Spring who looked to be at too tight an angle to score, but somehow he managed to blast the ball into the roof of the net.

From then on it could have been a cricket score as Wycome continued to look woeful. Their half-hearted long balls were dealt with repeatedly by Chris Coyne and Alan Neilson, whose heads must ache this morning.

A glut of chances came Luton's way in the final ten minutes with Spring and Howard both coming within a whisker of scoring with long shots.

Brkovic's introduction down the right flank sparked some threat but in all honesty Wanderers were already a well beaten side.

Kinnear never felt the result was in doubt. "I could not see them carving us open – they were living on a prayer after the goal," said Kinnear.

"We should have punished them more in the last 15 minutes but Spring's magical left foot got us the points."

■ Transfer news: Kinnear will oversee a player coming in and another going out of Kenilworth Road this week. Ex-Hatter Chris Wilmot, now with Wimbledon, is fancied by the Hatters boss to fill the defensive gaps created by long-term injuries to Russ Perrett and David Bayliss.

Kinnear is discussing a loan move with Wilmot, while striker Carl Griffiths is going back to Wales to a Division Three side although Kinnear would not say whether it was Wrexham or Swansea.



■ On the ball: Tony Thorpe, who made the Hatters' goal



MATCH FACTS



LUTON TOWN (4-4-2): Emberson; Boyce, Coyne, Neilson, Kimble; Robinson (Brkovic 66m), Nicholls, Spring, Hughes; Howard, Thorpe. Subs not used: Ovendale, Fotiadis, Crowe, Hillier

Referee: Clive Wilkes (Gloucester)

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: Spring (56)
Wycombe: -

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 10
Wycombe: 1

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 6
Wycombe: 4

CORNERS

Luton: 12
Wycombe: 5

OFFSIDE

Luton: 2
Wycombe: 0

BOOKINGS

Luton: Nicholls (9), Howard (20)
Wycombe: Harris (11), Simpson (19), Brown (26)

ATTENDANCE: 7, 351

HATTERS' STAR MAN: MATTHEW SPRING

Scored, battled well in midfield, and his flair shone through

Division Two results

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

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	28	20	5	3	47	17	65
Crewe	28	17	5	6	48	22	56
Oldham	29	15	9	5	45	25	54
Cardiff	27	16	5	6	44	23	53
Bristol City	28	15	6	7	53	32	51
QPR	29	13	7	9	37	32	46
Luton	27	12	7	8	41	35	43
Blackpool	28	12	7	9	38	37	43
Tranmere	28	12	6	10	39	42	42
Plymouth	27	10	9	8	36	32	39
Swindon	29	10	8	11	40	42	38
Chesterfield	28	11	5	12	24	32	38
Brentford	26	10	7	9	32	30	37
Wycombe	29	9	8	12	40	39	35
Port Vale	27	8	7	12	31	40	31
Notts County	28	6	12	10	40	44	30
Peterborough	29	7	9	13	30	38	30
Stockport	29	8	5	16	39	50	29
Northampton	28	8	5	15	24	43	29
Barnsley	28	7	7	14	31	44	28
Mansfield	27	8	4	15	43	59	28
Colchester	28	6	9	13	28	41	27
Huddersfield	28	6	7	15	20	35	25
Cheltenham	27	5	9	13	24	40	24