

Kinnear engineers revival

02/03

Port Vale 1 Luton 2

A STIRRING second half display in a 2-1 victory over Port Vale secured Luton's eighth away win of the season and enhanced their chances of a play-off place.

Tony Thorpe opened the scoring four minutes after the interval and a Kevin Nicholls penalty sealed maximum points 15 minutes from time.

Luton showed little as an attacking force in the first half, with their defence working hard to keep Vale at bay.

And they needed help from the crossbar in the 10th minute when Steve McPhee's header left Mark Ovendale groping at thin air.

But the Hatters, no doubt given a tongue-lashing by manager Joe Kinnear, were a totally different proposition after the break.

Thorpe soon broke the deadlock when he rose, unopposed, to net a powerful header from a Nicholls corner. And further opportunities went begging before Nicholls made no mistake from the spot after Thorpe was upended by Ian Brightwell.

Mark Boyd netted Vale's consolation four minutes from time when he drove in after Marc Bridge-Wilkinson's corner was only partially cleared.

Port Vale manager Brian Horton launched a stinging attack on referee Lee Mason following his side's defeat.

The visitors got their second goal thanks to a penalty conceded by Brightwell for a foul on Thorpe and Horton was left seething by the referee's decision.

He said: "If that was a penalty I will eat my hat. Brightwell played the ball.

"We are told not to criticise referees but he was appalling. That was far from the only bad decision he made."

Horton also criticised his defence for allowing Thorpe's free header for the first goal, adding: "That sort of thing has happened to us far too often this season."

Luton manager Kinnear admitted he had to give his players a half time slating to spark an improvement.

He said: "It had been a nothing game so I put on an extra forward and told the players to have a real go.

"In fairness to them their response was excellent and we now have four successive home games to capitalise on our very good away form."