

'Sloppy' and 'lazy' Crowe angers Joe

DON'T be surprised if Hatters' shot-shy striker Dean Crowe is sporting a cut above his eyebrow this week.

Crowe, whose barren spell in front of goal was extended to 21 games during Saturday's 1-0 home defeat against Brentford, felt the full fury of Joe Kinnear, whose temper and demands for high standards are every bit as keen as Sir Alex Ferguson.

Even if Crowe did escape the flying-boot treatment favoured by Ferguson, the 23-year-old striker will, no doubt, still be nursing a headache after a vociferous, verbal tirade from his manager.

Crowe missed a simple opportunity to fire Luton in front after 20 minutes of Saturday's match when Paul Smith's terrible goal-kick handed him a clear run on goal.

The 5ft 5in forward never looked confident and, after bearing down on Smith's goal, inexplicably passed the ball out of play trying to find striking partner Tony Thorpe.

Kinnear held his head in his hands after watching such an excellent chance go begging but he was more disgusted by Crowe's subsequent performance and attitude.

The former Stoke striker was hauled off at half-time despite the lack of another attacking alternative on the bench.

Steve Howard's suspension, Andrew Fotiadis' transfer and Carl Griffiths' continued struggle to find match fitness had left Kinnear with no other option than to start Crowe and Thorpe together for the second successive match.

But Kinnear chose to use Steve Robinson, Ahmet Brkovic and even Chris Coyne as striking partners for Thorpe at different times after the break, such was the level of the Hatters manager's despair at Crowe's first-half performance.

Kinnear was typically forthright when asked to give

Joe view



I told a few of them they need to get their act together. They need to stand up and be counted and the pressure's really on a few because that hurt me. I don't mind getting beaten, it's the way we were beaten that annoys and frustrates me most. I've had sharp words with one or two of them who I thought the game drifted past for whatever reason. A few went missing and were not brave enough to go looking for the ball. Some forgot about hard work and that will not happen again.

his reasons behind Crowe's substitution, saying: "He made one run in the whole first-half and showed a very poor attitude. He's one of those kinds who always has to spit his dummy out."

"He did not make too many right decisions and was not willing to work hard. That's what hurts most because you usually associate that with him."

"I won't stand for that nonsense so I took him off and will be talking to him again. When their keeper kicked it to him he was clear through and I do not know what was going through his mind."

"He's a striker and should have made something happen but he did not even get in a

decent shot or make the keeper work. He went to pass it to Thorpe but it was a touch like an elephant and the ball went out for a goal-kick."

"He was sloppy, lazy and showed no determination. He even shrugged his shoulders as if to say 'so what' when he missed it."

Crowe's miss was the type Fotiadis, who incidentally opened his account for new club Peterborough with an identical chance on Saturday, was regularly castigated for by Kinnear during his time at Kenilworth Road.

And the Hatters boss has made it clear to Crowe that he must display greater mental toughness to also avoid being ruthlessly cast aside in the pursuit of building a team of winners.

Thorpe and Howard are already ahead of Crowe in the pecking order for strikers' places and Kinnear's eagerness to add another attacker to his squad would intensify competition even further.

But Crowe was not the only target of Kinnear's vitriol on Saturday.

The withdrawal of an apparently surprised Matthew Spring on 85 minutes served as a wake-up call after another lethargic performance from the Hatters midfielder.

Carl Emberson's shaky handling and suspect kicking were also condemned by Kinnear afterwards.

The Hatters boss said: "I never spotted Springy. He never got going and never got hold of the ball."

"Our keeper's kicking was dreadful. We could not get anything started, although he was not at fault for the goal."

"The boy turned well and lashed it in and you've got to give him some credit."

Rowan Vine, who has joined Brentford on loan from Portsmouth, struck on 50 minutes to earn the visitors their first league win of 2003, ending an eight-match wait.

The Bees striker fired a fierce half-volley past Emberson after latching on to a long



NO WAY THROUGH: Hatters striker Dean Crowe is the wrong side of his Brentford marker and later got on the wrong side of Joe Kinnear. **Picture: JOANNA CROSS**

punt upfield and shrugging off the attentions of Hatters defender Chris Willmott.

Luton's attempts at an equaliser afterwards were unusually feeble.

The absence of natural wide players and talismanic target man Howard placed extra onus on flair players such as Spring and Thorpe on Saturday.

But Spring's concerning recent dip in form continued against Brentford and Thorpe was often an isolated figure, bereft of support up front.

Kinnear's side have, nevertheless, compensated for the inevitable loss in quality caused by the departures of Matthew Taylor and Jean-Louis Valois with an excellent work ethic, team spirit and will to win this season.

But even those qualities were missing against a distinctly ordinary Brentford team.

Kinnear said: "Some players need to know you have got to win the battle first and then let ability come in. I'd sooner go down fighting than not at all and, if I have to chop off a few heads along the way, so be it."

"We were outfought and it's very unusual for that to happen with any side I run. A few have gone home with headaches."

Luton created the better opportunities during the early stages of Saturday's game with Willmott heading over from five yards after Kevin Nicholls' 18th-minute corner.

Crowe's glaring miss followed moments later before Brentford, who relied heavily on long balls to towering striker Mark McCammon, went close on 23 minutes.

Kevin O'Connor was unmarked five yards from Emberson's goal, but volleyed weakly at the home keeper.

Thorpe's low drive was kept out by Smith's legs at the other end and the Hatters striker then sent a well-struck volley flashing across the face of goal.

Brentford almost snatched the lead on the stroke of half-time, but Emberson saved at McCammon's feet and Willmott then brilliantly blocked Vine's follow-up effort.

Robinson replaced Crowe for the second-half and his striking partner Thorpe

sidestepped a challenge before curling a shot inches wide on 49 minutes.

Brentford went ahead seconds later and Kinnear's men failed to reply despite tactical changes from their manager.

Brkovic joined Thorpe and Robinson in a pint-sized pronged strikeforce before Coyne was pushed upfield for the last five minutes to add his height to the Hatters' front line.

But Paul Hughes' diving header over the bar on 72 minutes was the nearest Luton came to an equaliser, while McCammon twice went close to doubling the visitors' lead on 87 minutes.

Emberson saved McCammon's sidefooted shot after he had turned Willmott on the touchline and the big striker then headed over the bar from close range.

The defeat was Luton's sixth at Kenilworth Road this season and only relegation-threatened quintet Peterborough, Port Vale, Mansfield, Northampton and Cheltenham have lost more Division Two home games.

matchfacts

LUTON 0 BRENTFORD 1

● **HATTERS:** Carl Emberson, Alan Neilson, Chris Willmott, Chris Coyne, Sol Davis, Ahmet Brkovic, Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring (Ian Hillier, 85), Paul Hughes, Tony Thorpe, Dean Crowe (Steve Robinson, 46). Subs not used: Russell Perrett, Lars Hirschfeld, Alan Kimble.

● **BRENTFORD:** Paul Smith, Michael Dobson, Lee Fieldwick, Matt Somner, Andy Frampton, Jay Smith, Jamie Fullarton (Eddie Hutchinson 45), Mark McCammon, Rowan Vine, Kevin O'Connor, Stephen Hunt. Subs not

used: Alan Julian, Leon Constantine, Mark Williams, Mark Peters.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 3 Brentford 4.

● **Off target:** Luton 7 Brentford 6.

● **Corners:** Luton 9 Brentford 3.

● **Referee:** Andy Hall (West Midlands).

● **TOP HATTER:** Chris Coyne - maintained his normal standard of performance while most of his teammates struggled for form. Coped well with the aerial threat of Brentford's Mark McCammon, but could not grab a goal when he was sent forward as an emergency striker.



SOLID: Sol Davis.

playerwatch

HATTERS DEFENDER SOL DAVIS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

● **Time on pitch:** 90 minutes

● **Shots on target:** 0

● **Shots off target:** 0

● **Blocked shots:** 0

● **Passes to own player:** 16

● **Passes to opposition:** 7

● **Crosses to own player:** 1

● **Crosses to opposition:** 4

● **Pass completion rate:** 60.7 per cent

● **Dribble ball retained:** 3

● **Dribble ball lost:** 2

Sol makes solid comeback

● **Dribble completion rate:** 60 per cent

● **Tackles:** 3

● **Headers:** 4

● **Clearances, blocks and interceptions:** 3

● **Offsides:** 0

● **Free-kicks won:** 3

● **Free-kicks conceded:** 2

● **Bookings:** 0

● **FINAL VERDICT:** Davis was

one of the better players on a disappointing day for Luton. The left back, playing his first game since January 1, was solid but rarely the overlapping threat he can be. He made only five crosses with just one finding a teammate. Defensively, he was only required to make three tackles and three clearances, blocks and interceptions.