



It'll take a miracle now admits Hatters boss

02/03

SPURNED chances, an early Tony Thorpe injury and a first half dismissal for his replacement Adrian Forbes all conspired to this goalless scoreline.

Hatters boss Joe Kinnear admitted it would not take a 'miracle' to catch QPR in the final play-off spot.

A twisted ankle forced Thorpe off after just 14 minutes and to compound the problem substitute Forbes received a straight red for an unprovoked elbow in the face on Graham Allen.

With both teams desperate for the points, it was ten-man Luton that looked more likely to win, wasting two great chances late in the game.

Kinnear gave a debut to recent loan signing from Reading, Sammy Igoe, and surprisingly it was Forbes who had to make way for the newcomer.

Hatters' fans were also heartened to see the return of right back Emmerson Boyce with Chris Willmott, Ian Hillier, Paul Hughes and Mark Ovendale on the bench – the strongest they have looked in that department all season.

It took Igoe just seven minutes to make his first favourable impression with the fans, leaving his marker for dead with a clever foot over the ball.

He searched out Boyce overlapping down the right, whose cross into the box was too long for Steve Howard but fell kindly for Ahmet Brkovic 18 yards out, whose goal-bound effort was blocked.

In a dull first half, Luton had Russ Perrett to thank on 14 minutes when Rovers striker Ian Hulme's pacy run from the halfway line left him with just Emberson to beat Perrett's sliding tackle took the ball off Hulme's foot on the point of shooting.

On 31 minutes came the game's major talking point. Forbes, who had come on for the injured Thorpe to partner Howard up front, was challenged from behind by Allen and in a moment of madness he lashed out with his right elbow, flooring the Rovers skipper.

Referee Andy D'Urso had no hesitation in showing the red card for an incident totally out of character from Forbes.

Forbes walked dejectedly off the field, having only returned to the side two weeks ago after recovering from a career-threatening injury.

The decision was predictably unpopular with the Kenilworth Road crowd, who were also upset at the treatment dished out by centre back Ian Sharps to Howard, which consistently went unpunished.

It was going to be a tall order for ten-men but they had to go for the win in the second half.



They had a penalty claim rejected on 55 minutes. Brkovic's run into the box and subsequent shot was parried by goalkeeper Russell Howarth, who came out to claim the rebound, pushing over Brkovic with his aggressive jump. D'Urso waved away Luton's protests.

Despite the best efforts of Hulme, posing a constant threat up front, Tranmere asked very few questions of the Town defence.

With Perrett and Coyne outstanding at the back, Luton went in search of nicking a goal.

Their best chances came five minutes from in quick succession but substitute Paul Hughes fluffed his lines with the first and Sol Davies going close with the second.

After some creative play on the left between Howard and Matthew Spring, the striker played a ball through the middle that gave Hughes a free run at goal.

After being pushed wide, Hughes had the ball taken off his foot six yards out.

Two minutes later, left back Davies made a foray into the Tranmere half, got to the by-line, and his cross-cum-shot was palmed away by Howarth.

The draw was of no use to either side in their scramble for a play-off place, especially when the fans head that QPR had bad beaten high-flying Cardiff City.

With six games left, the chances of reaching a top six place are all but over.

Kinnear almost admitted as



■ Yesterday's action: Sammy Igoe (top) shows his skills on his debut on loan from Reading. Above: Russ Perrett clears off the line to deny Tranmere Rovers a goal in a game that ended in stalemate

much. "All we can do is hope. We need a miracle now."

"We are relying on others to drop points."

Of the game itself, Kinnear was annoyed his side didn't take all three points.

"I should be standing here talking about a victory. Better finishing would have seen us win easily." The Hatters boss rightly singled out Igoe for praise. "He was the one bright thing to come out of the

game. He is out of contract at the end of the season and I would love to bring him here permanently."

The diminutive winger was worthy of the man-of-the-match nomination for his flair on the ball and non-stop workrate.

With Thorpe out for a month, Forbes now suspended and Dean Crowe out for the season with a broken leg, it leaves the Hatters with Howard as the only recognised striker.



MATCH FACTS



LUTON TOWN (4-4-2): Emberson; Boyce (Hillier 81m), Perrett, Coyne, Davies; Igoe, Nicholls, Spring, Brkovic (Hughes 75); Howard, Thorpe (Forbes 14)

Referee: Andy D'Urso (Essex)

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: 0
Tranmere: 0

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 5
Tranmere: 2

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 1
Tranmere: 3

CORNERS

Luton: 2
Tranmere: 0

OFFSIDE

Luton: 7
Tranmere: 7

BOOKINGS

Luton: Brkovic, Forbes (sent off), Howard
Tranmere: Nicholson

ATTENDANCE: 6,326

HATTERS STAR MAN: SAMMY IGEOE

Impressive debut, nice touches

Division Two results

Brentford	2	Cheltenham	2
Cardiff	1	QPR	2
Crewe	P	Bristol City	P
Huddersfield	4	Chesterfield	0
LUTON	0	Tranmere	0
Mansfield	0	Port Vale	1
Notts County	3	Blackpool	1
Oldham	2	Barnsley	1
Peterborough	1	Swindon	1
Plymouth	0	Colchester	0
Wycombe	1	Stockport	4

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	41	26	11	4	62	24	89
Crewe	40	23	8	9	71	36	77
Oldham	41	20	14	7	57	33	74
Cardiff	39	21	10	8	60	35	73
Bristol City	40	21	9	10	67	41	72
QPR	41	20	10	11	62	44	70
Tranmere	41	18	11	12	54	54	65
Luton	40	16	11	13	56	53	59
Plymouth	41	15	13	13	56	46	58
Blackpool	41	15	11	15	52	55	56
Colchester	41	13	14	14	48	49	53
Swindon	41	13	12	12	54	57	51
Notts County	41	12	15	14	60	65	51
Brentford	41	13	11	17	43	50	50
Wycombe	40	13	10	17	57	58	49
Barnsley	41	11	13	17	47	59	46
Port Vale	41	12	10	19	45	61	46
Chesterfield	41	13	7	21	40	63	46
Stockport	41	12	9	20	55	64	45
Peterborough	40	10	14	16	43	51	44
Cheltenham	40	9	14	17	45	62	41
Huddersfield	41	10	10	21	35	53	40
Mansfield	41	11	7	23	58	84	40
Northampton	41	10	8	23	35	65	38