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Robins striker heads 10th league goal of season

Alsop's late show

rescues a point

CHELTHENHAM TOWN	2
LUTON TOWN	2

by Derek Goddard

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JULIAN Alsop headed his 10th Nationwide League division two goal of the season to keep Cheltenham Town's survival flame flickering at Whaddon Road last night.

The striker struck nine minutes from time after goals by Luton Town's Paul Hughes and Adrian Forbes had sandwiched midfielder Grant McCann's 26th-minute penalty.

Alsop, sent off at Brentford on Saturday for a flare-up with Leo Roget, was sent out with 22 minutes to go when manager Bobby Gould switched from a 4-4-2 formation to 3-4-3.

Alsop went on for right-back David Bird after 68 minutes. It was a gamble that had to be taken and it paid off to a degree, but one point from their 15th draw of the season was not really what Cheltenham needed.

They left themselves two points behind 20th-placed Peterborough with 42 and

with five games left, the first on Saturday at Whaddon Road against an Oldham Athletic side going for automatic promotion.

Three of those five matches are at Whaddon Road – the other two are against Peterborough United (April 21) and Blackpool (April 26) – and they have to aim for at least nine points from the 15 available.

Joe Kinnear's Luton, robust but skilful, were the better side, but they could have lost without Cheltenham-born full-back Sol Davis' super clearance from central midfielder Mark Yates in the 83rd minute.

Yates, beyond the far post, met perfectly a free-kick taken on the left by McCann and the ball was heading for the far corner when it suddenly veered away.

Davis had dashed in to get the slightest of touches to the shot and that one action could have painful repercussions for Cheltenham.

Gould sprang a surprise when he left out Steve Book, who was not even on the bench, and restored Shane Higgs in goal for his fifth start in the league. His last start was the 4-1 defeat by Queens Park Rangers on March 18.

The first of relatively few chances was made by Cheltenham and by midfielder Martin Devaney, who got away on the right and closed on goalkeeper Carl Emberson in the seventh minute.

Emberson slid out and got in the way of the shot and Devaney's second stab went for a corner.

Luton's luck, five minutes later, was better. Forbes crossed from the right and Hughes scored a remarkable goal. As the ball landed, he met it with what was effectively a drop-kick and it speared past the helpless Higgs.

Cheltenham had not had a division two penalty all season until Saturday at Brentford, but McCann slammed in another in the 26th minute after referee Trevor Parkes judged that Kevin

Match facts

CHELTHENHAM TOWN

Corners	7
Offside	3
Shots on target	7
Shots off target	3
Fouls committed	14
Cautions	3

LUTON TOWN

Corners	4
Offside	11
Shots on target	3
Shots off target	6
Fouls committed	17
Cautions	0

Nationwide League division two

	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Wigan	41	11	7	2	31	15	15	4	2	31	9	89
Crewe	40	11	3	6	27	16	12	5	3	44	20	77
Cardiff	40	12	5	4	33	17	10	5	4	31	18	76
Oldham	41	9	6	6	31	18	11	8	1	26	15	74
Bristol City	40	12	5	3	34	13	9	4	7	33	28	72
QPR	41	12	3	5	34	19	8	7	6	28	25	70
Tranmere	41	11	5	4	30	22	7	6	8	24	32	65
Luton	41	8	6	7	29	25	8	6	6	29	30	60
Plymouth	41	9	6	6	35	24	6	7	7	21	22	58
Blackpool	41	10	6	4	31	20	5	5	11	21	35	56
Colchester	41	8	6	6	23	17	5	8	8	25	32	53
Swindon	41	8	5	7	30	25	5	7	9	24	32	51
Notts Co	41	9	7	5	36	31	3	8	9	24	34	51
Brentford	41	8	7	6	26	18	5	4	11	17	32	50
Wycombe	41	8	5	8	38	37	5	5	10	19	25	49
Barnsley	41	6	8	6	24	27	5	5	11	23	32	46
Port Vale	41	7	4	9	25	27	5	6	10	20	34	46
Chesterfield	41	10	4	6	27	23	3	3	15	13	40	46
Stockport	41	6	8	6	33	33	6	1	14	22	31	45
Peterboro	40	5	7	8	21	20	5	7	8	22	31	44
Cheltenham	41	5	7	8	21	29	4	8	9	26	35	42
Huddersfield	41	7	7	7	26	23	3	3	14	9	30	40
Mansfield	41	8	2	11	36	43	3	5	12	22	41	40
Northampton	41	7	3	11	21	26	3	5	12	14	39	38

Last night's other division two result: Wycombe W 0 Cardiff C 4

Nicholls had fouled central midfielder John Finnigan.

Luton's central defensive pairing was broken up when Russell Perrett was replaced by Ian Hillier in the 32nd minute.

Chris Willmott moved from right-back to centre-half with Hillier going to right-back six minutes before Cheltenham contributed to their own downfall again.

Hillier's cross dropped over central defender Michael Duff, who appeared to leave the ball, and Forbes slid in behind him and rolled his shot in.

Luton, needing a win to boost their

slim hopes of reaching the play-offs, almost had a third goal before half-time, but Higgs saved Cheltenham by throwing himself in the general direction of the ball when leading striker Steve Howard got a toe to Willmott's knock-down.

McCann's set-piece kicks remained Cheltenham's most dangerous weapon and from a free-kick in the 54th minute, Yates did well to get between two players, but he saw his header hit a post.

Hillier was carried off on a stretcher after a tackle on McCann and former Fulham and Wimbledon defender Duncan Jupp took over after 60 minutes.

Matthew Spring stretched Cheltenham when he took a return pass from Howard, who has 16 league goals this season, and hit a firm drive just over the bar after on-loan Marvin Brown had been substituted by Tony Naylor with 17 minutes left.

After Alsop's goal, Cheltenham had nine minutes plus another four added on for stoppages, but could not get the three points they really needed.

Cheltenham Town: Higgs, Bird (Alsop 68), M Duff, S Duff, Victory, Devaney, Yates, Finnigan, McCann, Brough, Brown (Naylor 73). Other subs, Brayson, Milton, Howarth.

Luton Town: Emberson, Willmott, Perrett (Hillier 32, Jupp 60), Coyne, Davis, Igoe, Nicholls, Spring, Hughes, Howard, Forbes (Holmes 87). Other subs, Ovendale, Kimble.

Referee: Trevor Parkes. **Attendance:** 3,762.

Picture: Jo Harvell 231247-1



■ IN THE THICK OF IT: Cheltenham striker John Brough battles for possession