



Under pressure: Left, Luton Town's Sol Davis fends off the attentions of City's Joe Burnell

Great leap: City's Christian Roberts (right) makes his presence felt by winning a vital header

02/03

LAST-GASP GOAL IS A CHOKER FOR CITY

BRISTOL City left Bedfordshire feeling thoroughly disappointed as they saw their victory hopes shattered late on in a real topsy turvy clash at Kenilworth Road.

The Robins had fallen behind to a Steve Howard header just a minute into a fiercely competitive encounter, only to be rescued by a Brian Tinnion penalty midway through the second half.

The visitors surged into the lead soon after with a looping Lee Peacock header, only for Howard to equalise with another powerful header of his own to earn his side a point.

Sub, Peter Beadle, missed a great chance to win the game for City late on, as he drove wide with just the keeper to beat and the opportunity was lost.

Danny Wilson made just one switch from the side that held Crewe so impressively in the week.

Mickey Bell began that game but found himself substituted in the 26th minute at Gresty Road by the man who stepped in to his boots here, Matthew Hill, which meant the experienced Georgie had to be content with a place on the bench.

The City boss did, however, make inform striker Leroy Lita one of his substitutes, the youngster fresh off the back of his hat-trick on Wednesday for the reserves, which meant no place at all in the final 16 for fellow teenager Liam Rosendor.

Luton had gone into this fixture with a string of injury problems to contend with, including ex-Robins' marksman Tony Thorpe, while knowing too they had no chance of making the play-offs.

In contrast, the visitors were enjoying a rich vein of form, determined still to secure that second automatic promotion place but only too aware that three points were the order of the day at Kenilworth Road.

So, it was a real stunner for the men in red to find themselves trailing after just 59 seconds of a whirlwind opening by the Hatters.

Matthew Spring swung the ball into the middle for striker **STEVE HOWARD** to rise powerfully and thump his header past Steve Phillips and in for a shock opener.

It was the worst possible start for City in a very competitive and highly-charged start to the contest with Luton, with little to play for other than pride, clearly eager to make their mark.

LUTON TOWN 2

BRISTOL CITY 2

by Simon Parkinson

at Kenilworth Road



The locals were relishing it and bayed their support as their opponents struggled to get a foothold, though one good seventh-minute move almost led to joy for Lee Peacock who turned smartly and fired in a low shot towards the bottom corner of the net that teenage debutant, Robert Beckwith, did extremely well to turn behind with a smart reaction save.

Thankfully as far as City were concerned by the midway stage of the half some of the heat had been taken out of Luton's play as the Robins began to plot a route back into the game.

They forced two quickfire corners to put the Hatters' defence under momentary pressure, though were relieved in the 25th minute when the lively Spring skipped inside Louis Carey and was shaping to shoot when the midfielder ran into a wall of defenders and the visitors were only too relieved to clear their line.

Certainly things were far from going to plan for the reds, who were struggling to work effective openings against a robust and tenacious outfit.

Phillips had to spread himself bravely at the feet of Griffiths as the forward threatened to wriggle his way through a gap and Luton pressed for the goal that would pose real problems for their opponents.

Spring went into the referee's book for bundling over City skipper Tommy Doherty in a heavy midfield tussle, the Robins' midfielder becoming the third of his team-mates to require treatment after Scott Murray and Christian Roberts had earlier been flattened under similar challenges.

Shortly after, Chris Willmott was also cautioned, Doherty again on the receiving end as he was scythed down on the edge of the Luton box, to give City a free kick in a dangerous position.

The kick was left to defender Danny Coles to strike firmly but straight into

the Luton wall and hopes of a leveller before the break were dashed.

Doherty, who faces a two-match suspension at the back end of the season, after collecting his 10th booking of the campaign recently, found himself frustrated again as he was hauled off by his manager, six minutes from half time, to be replaced by Aaron Brown, which meant Brian Tinnion moving in field to cover for his captain.

There was scare for City again four minutes from the interval, when Spring and Howard combined in a replica of the move that saw the home team into the lead at the start of the game.

Again the midfielder swung a pinpoint cross into the centre for the bustling striker to this time head straight at a grateful Phillips. The Robins could breathe again.

And on the stroke of the break there were vociferous appeals for a penalty for an innocuous tussle involving Hill and Griffiths in which the referee was not in the least bit interested.

With tackles continuing to fly in freely, the game boiled over in first-half stoppage time, a touchline melee ending with striker Griffiths becoming the third Luton man to be booked.

Still the official wasn't finished and a minute later Kevin Nicholls was cautioned for clattering into Tinnion as a very physical opening period drew to a close.

HALF TIME:
LUTON 1
BRISTOL CITY 0

CITY knew they needed to emerge from the tunnel all guns blazing if they were to retrieve the situation.

And they very nearly equalised in spectacular fashion as Hill let fly with a thunderbolt from well outside the area that Beckwith again was equal to with a superb tip-over save, to keep his team in front.

At the other end, Luton had screams for another penalty waved away, this time for an alleged handball in a crowded City box, as the contest remained full-blooded and on a knife edge.

Carey had to put the ball behind for a corner with Paul Hughes lurking at the back post in the hope of meeting a right-wing cross as the home side charged forward in search of the kill.

There was a fleeting moment of

encouragement for the Robins when Murray, who had been kept very subdued in the first half, finally saw a chink of light ahead of him as he sprinted through the middle towards goal.

But City's 25-goal top scorer was forced wide and was eventually halted in his tracks by some good cover play.

Then, 12 minutes into the half, Peacock won himself space down City's left side before picking out Roberts at the near post, who couldn't quite get the bouncing ball, not helped by the gusty wind, under control and the ball eventually trickled out for a goal kick.

It was to prove the Welshman's final kick as he was instantly taken off by his boss and replaced by Peter Beadle, making a very rare appearance after another injury-hit season.

The visitors were clearly looking to use the big striker's height to good effect with some good deliveries from the flanks, though he wasn't too far away from connecting with Brown's wayward drive along the ground as the ball fizzed just past his boot.

Remarkably, as City broke forward in numbers shortly after, Beadle, hovering on the edge of the six-yard box, again saw the ball fly across goal and only just elude him with just a touch required, surely, to bring City level.

Brown, meanwhile, was getting into the game that much more with some useful skills around the left flank and on 65 minutes he was deemed to have been fouled by Peter Holmes inside the Luton box.

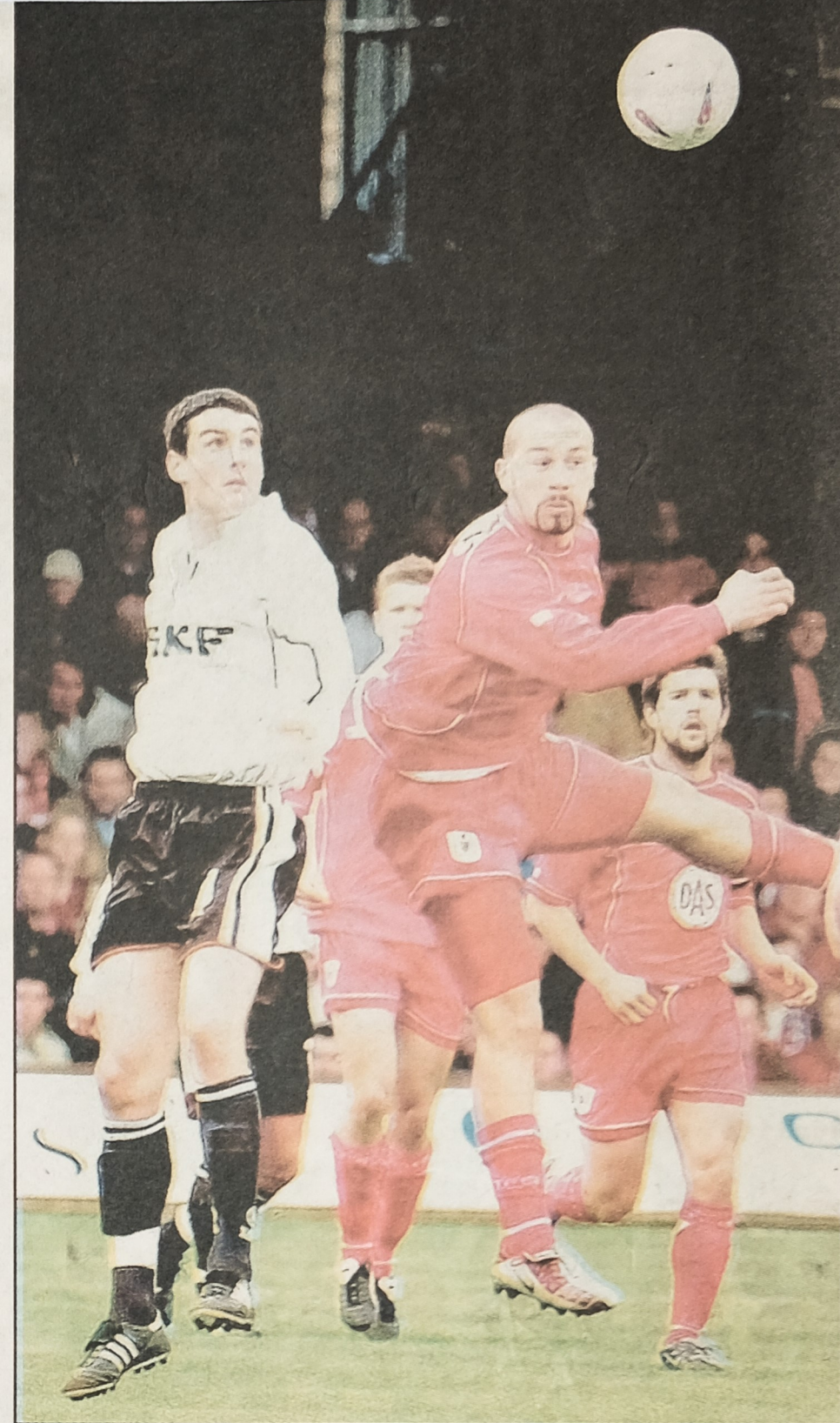
TINNION was only too happy to size the ball up before slotting the spot kick just inside the diving Beckwith's right post to bring his team level at last.

Then, after a spell of sustained pressure, City, generally renowned for their slick build-up play, snatched the lead in classic route one fashion.

Danny Coles hoofed the ball upfield from defence in search of **PEACOCK**, who won the battle for possession with defender, Alan Neilson and did superbly well to nudge a first-time header over the stranded Beckwith and into the net to the joy of the City team and 1,222 Robins' followers, massed behind that goal.

However, there was to be another twist as the Hatters stole a heartbreaking 82nd minute equaliser.

Phillips had just made a good save to deny Spring but as the ball was clipped back towards the far post, **HOWARD** was there again to send a scorching header home and bring the scores level again.



TEAMCHECK

LUTON

47 Robert Beckwith
3 Alan Neilson
4 Matthew Spring
8 Kevin Nicholls (c)
10 Carl Griffiths
17 Emmerson Boyce
19 Steve Howard
20 Peter Holmes
21 Paul Hughes
24 Sol Davis
37 Chris Willmott
Substitutes
22 David Bayliss
31 Alan Kimble
41 Kevin Foley
43 Matthew Judge
33 Dean Brill

BRISTOL CITY

1 Steve Phillips
2 Louis Carey
4 Tommy Doherty (c)
5 Tony Butler
6 Matthew Hill
7 Scott Murray
8 Joe Burnell
10 Lee Peacock
11 Brian Tinnion
18 Christian Roberts
19 Danny Coles.
Substitutes:
3 Mickey Bell
9 Peter Beadle
12 Aaron Brown
14 Mike Stowell
33 Leroy Lita

REFEREE

G Salisbury

ATTENDANCE

6,381