



SO NEAR AND YET...Matthew Spring breaks through the Bristol City defence during Saturday's 2-2 draw at Kenilworth Road.

Picture: JOANNA CROSS

Becks saves the day!

LUTON'S injury jinx struck again on Saturday handing rookie goalkeeper Robert Beckwith a shock debut.

Manager Joe Kinnear was forced to throw the 18-year-old stopper into the firing line against Bristol City when Mark Ovendale aggravated an old hip injury in the pre-match warm-up.

And with no time for nerves to get the better of him, Beckwith turned in an accomplished display against the promotion contenders.

Several top class saves, confident kicking and even a Bruce Grobbelaar-style dribble along his own goal line left his manager full of praise for the teenager after the 2-2 draw.

But the boss was less pleased with Peter Holmes and Alan Neilson, who gifted City their goals with two schoolboy mistakes.

If Luton's play-off hopes had still been alive, Kinnear would have undoubtedly staged his own version of the Easter crucifixion on the duo.



Joe's view

Ovendale's hip went again. I thought 'that's a great start to the day'. But it worked in our favour. The lad was a little bit apprehensive. He made one top class save in the second-half. He can look back on today and be very pleased with himself. He's done enough to stay in the side to the end of the season.

But with the promotion pressure lifted it took just 58 seconds for the Hatters to edge in front when striker Steve Howard headed home Matthew Spring's fine cross from the left past visiting keeper Steve Phillips.

Beckwith didn't have to wait long to show off his shot-stopping credentials, plunging sharply to his left to keep out Lee Peacock's low seventh-minute strike.

In a first-half of few chances, tackles went flying in as tempers threatened to boil over as they had in the corresponding fixture at Ashton

Gate in December, when Sol Davis saw red.

Scott Murray and Peacock were left writhing in a heap after strong challenges which left Robins' manager and former Luton favourite Danny Wilson fuming when they went unpunished by Lancashire referee Graham Salisbury.

Luton ended up with four first-half bookings - for Matthew Spring, Chris Willmott, Kevin Nicholls and returning striker Carl Griffiths, who enjoyed an impressive belated first game of the campaign.

Bristol came out after the break in determined mood,

forcing a succession of corners - the first after Matthew Hill had sent a 30-yard thunderbolt arrowing towards the top right corner, only for Beckwith to spectacularly claw the ball to safety.

Having survived that scare, Luton had a strong appeal for a penalty turned down when Spring's poke towards goal appeared to strike a City arm.

Playing with far more fluency than in the disappointing loss at QPR, Luton appeared to be growing in confidence, signified by Spring's first-time 30 yarder which flew over.

Bristol almost grabbed a controversial equaliser on 56 minutes when the referee played on after Boyce appeared to be caught in the face by Peacock, leaving Beckwith to smother Christian Roberts' close-range effort.

But with a frustrated City struggling to break down Luton's resilient defence, they were handed a route back into the game when midfielder Holmes wrestled back City substitute Aaron Brown to concede a soft penalty.

The spot-kick was put away by veteran Brian Tinnion despite Beckwith getting a glove on the ball.

It was another defensive blunder just a minute later which saw the Hatters fall behind. A harmless-looking long ball was inexplicably left by Neilson and as he urged Beckwith to claim the ball, Peacock nipped in to head over the youngster.

Defeat would have been harsh on Luton and they claimed a deserved point with

just eight minutes left on the clock. Griffiths' clever flick put Spring clear in the box but his angled shot was saved by Phillips. However, the ball ran to Boyce whose cross from the right was emphatically headed home by Howard.

There was still time for Bristol to waste a golden chance to claim maximum points.

Substitute Peter Beadle, who scored a 96-minute equaliser in the December encounter, was put through on 86 minutes but dragged his shot wide.

match facts

LUTON 2 BRISTOL CITY 2

● **HATTERS:** Robert Beckwith, Emmerson Boyce, Chris Willmott, Alan Neilson, Sol Davis, Paul Hughes (Alan Kimble, 87), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Peter Holmes (Kevin Foley, 69), Steve Howard, Carl Griffiths. Subs not used: David Bayliss, Matthew Judge, Dean Brill.

● **BRISTOL CITY:** Steve Phillips, Louis Carey, Tommy Doherty (Aaron Brown, 38), Tony Butler, Matthew Hill, Scott Murray, Joe Burnell, Lee Peacock, Brian Tin-

nion (Leroy Lita, 87), Christian Roberts (Peter Beadle, 57), Danny Coles. Subs not used: Mickey Bell, Mike Stowell.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 4 Bristol City 4.

● **Shots off target:** Luton 1 Bristol City 6.

● **Corners:** Luton 3 Bristol City 11.

● **Referee:** Graham Salisbury.

● **Top Hatter:** Robert Beckwith. Two outstanding saves were the highlights of a confident debut. Mistakes by experienced players cost him a deserved clean sheet.



KEEN: Lee Mansell.

LUTON Town midfielder Lee Mansell would "even play in goal" to stay at the club.

Those were the words of Mansell's dad Paul this week following a story in our sister paper *The Herald & Post* about his son's loan move to Nuneaton Borough, writes Mark Wood.

Manager Joe Kinnear had said that his decision to loan out the attacking midfielder had been as a result of

'My Lee would play in goal for Hatters' says dad

Mansell's reluctance to play in a wide midfield role.

But in a telephone call to the *News-Gazette*, Mr Mansell said: "Lee would give his eye teeth to play for the Hatters. He would even play in goal if that's what the club wanted him to do."

Central midfield is obviously Mansell's preferred

position, but Kinnear said during an Evening with the Supporters Club: "Lee Mansell does not want to play out wide and that's why he has gone out."

"He wants to play in the centre of midfield but we have got Spring doing that and he would have to go a bit to get in ahead of him."

Mr Mansell said that his son's "long-term ambition is still to play for Luton Town."

"He played for 18 months in the reserves and thinks playing for Nuneaton in the Conference is better than reserve team football."

"All he wants to do is try and impress, earn another contract with the Hatters

and let his football do the talking."

Mr Mansell also revealed that Chester had expressed an interest in taking his son on loan earlier in the season, but injury problems at Luton had stopped the deal.

Since joining Nuneaton Mansell has scored twice for the Conference club.