

Sad Town limp past the post!

IN A campaign blighted by injuries it was somewhat apt that Luton Town's season limped over the finishing line against Swindon on Saturday.

With play-off hopes extinguished several weeks ago, manager Joe Kinnear summed up his feelings after another meaningless match by declaring "the season's over; thank God it's over."

A lack-lustre display would have been irritating enough for Kinnear, but a further bitter pill was how Luton's defeat allowed last season's promotion rivals Plymouth to snatch eighth spot from the Town on goal difference.

At a wet and windy County Ground there were too many performances well below par from players who might have had their minds on jetting off for a summer break.

With nothing to play for, mid-table Swindon, managed by ex-Luton player Andy King, played an attacking formation of three strikers.

By far the most potent of that trio was Sam Parkin, the Robins' player of the season. The ex-Chelsea attacker was the first to test Luton keeper Robert Beckwith on seven minutes when he broke through on the left side of the box but his effort was smothered by the young stopper.

Good defending from Alan Kimble – recalled for the suspended Sol Davis – prevented Danny Invincible opening the scoring on 23 minutes with a far-post header.

The veteran left-back slid in to smuggle the goalbound effort around the post with Beckwith looking well beaten.

Joe view



Thorpe did well and took his goal well but we missed a bucketful of chances. Thorpey might have had three and Spring missed from eight yards. The season's over. Thank God it's over. All I was concerned with was not getting any injuries, no bookings and no sendings off.

Luton went ahead on 31 minutes with their first meaningful attack.

A quick free-kick from Kevin Nicholls saw Bart Griemink punch clear as defender David Bayliss looked poised to sneak in and head for goal.

The clash left Bayliss dazed and Griemink crucially out of position as the ball fell to Ahmet Brkovic on the left-hand edge of the box.

He scooped a cross to the back post for Emmerson Boyce to rise unmarked and head the ball across the face of the goal where Tony Thorpe stooped to nod in from a yard out for his 16th of the season.

Referee Andy Penn offered Swindon a great chance to get back on terms four minutes later.

The ball had squirmed out for a corner. However the official surprised both sides by spotting an innocuous obstruction offence and ordering an indirect free-

kick deep in Luton's penalty area.

Andy Gurney, faced with the entire Hatters team along their goal-line smashed his effort against Beckwith's legs.

Hesitation between the keeper and Boyce then allowed Eric Sabin to nip in, only for Beckwith to push his poked effort to safety.

But the youngster was helpless to prevent Swindon drawing level in spectacular style on 41 minutes.

A long throw was cleared to the right-hand edge of the penalty area where Stefan Miglioranza arrowed a sweet half-volley into the top corner.

Luton barely had time to regroup before they fell behind just two minutes later.

A Junior Lewis free-kick from the right was met by Parkin unmarked eight yards from goal.

The giant striker netted with a powerful header despite Beckwith getting a strong hand on the ball.

Trying to repair the damage, Kinnear replaced midfielder Ahmet Brkovic with winger Adrian Forbes at half-time.

Forbes, back from a three-match ban for his red card against Tranmere, was played as a third striker alongside Thorpe and Steve Howard but looked off the pace and struggled to make any impact.

Howard, well marshalled by Swindon captain Matthew Hewlett, also never looked like adding to his 23-goal haul for the season.

Swindon almost made the game safe on 57 minutes when sloppy defending allowed Parkin to slide a pass to Matthew Heywood eight yards out.

With no Luton player near him, Heywood had time to



SCRAMBLE! Luton striker Tony Thorpe and Swindon keeper Bart Griemink battle for the ball during Saturday's County Ground showdown. Picture: GARETH OWEN

matchfacts

SWINDON 2 LUTON TOWN 1

● **SWINDON TOWN:** Bart Griemink, Matthew Hewlett, Matthew Heywood, Andy Gurney, Danny Invincible (Dave Bampton, 86), Junior Lewis, Steve Robinson, Eric Sabin (Ian Herring, 80), David Duke, Stefan Miglioranza (Chris Taylor, 89), Sam Parkin.

● **LUTON TOWN:** Robert Beckwith, Emmerson Boyce (Kevin Foley, 82), David Bayliss, Alan Neilson, Alan Kimble, Paul Hughes, Ahmet Brkovic (Adrian Forbes, 46), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring (Aaron Skelton, 84), Steve Howard, Tony Thorpe. Subs not used: Parys Okai, Dean Brill.

● Shots on target: Swindon Town 9 Luton Town 4.

● Shots off target: Swindon Town 5 Luton Town 5.

● Corners: Swindon Town 9 Luton Town 4.

● Booked, Swindon Town: Eric Sabin 73, Steve Robinson 79. Luton Town: Kevin Nicholls 37, Ahmet Brkovic 42, David Bayliss 88.

● Attendance: 6,455.

● Referee: Andy Penn of West Midlands.

● Man of the match: Tony Thorpe. A goal and he looked reasonably lively despite getting little service.



IN: Michael Leary.

HATTERS midfielder Michael Leary has put pen to paper on a new two-year contract.

The 20-year-old Londoner has shone in the reserves this season after progressing through the youth ranks.

Leary's only first team experience has been in the LDV Vans Trophy, but he is sure to get the chance to break into the first team

Leary signs up as Joe seeks quality

after committing himself to the club until June 2005.

His signature is hopefully the first of many as Town manager Joe Kinnear fine-tunes his squad ahead of next season.

Speaking after Saturday's game against Swindon, he said: "We have done remarkably well this sea-

son considering the injuries. We had seven players today who would arguably not have been in the team if it wasn't for injuries.

"Thankfully there was not a lot to play for. Once we found out that the play-offs were out of the question we wanted to finish

the season as soon as possible.

"I am moving out 10 players but because of finances only moving in five."

Kinnear's top priority is a "quality left-sided player" and the issue was raised in talks with chairman Mike Watson-Challis recently.