



How could Hatters lose this?

IT'S not been a great week to be a Luton Town supporter.

In a week when he was forced to sell his star striker, Tony Thorpe to rivals QPR, Luton manager Mike Newell will this morning be struggling to understand just how Luton lost this game.

Grimsby, who had all the flare of a packet of ready salted crisps, stole all three points with goals from Iain Anderson and Michael Bolding - Grimsby's only two shots on target all game.

Kevin Nicholls' late penalty was all Luton had to show from a game they should easily have won. Luton completely dominated this scrappy affair.

Grimsby's game plan, from kick-off, seemed to be to play for a draw and, to be fair, they stuck to their guns - stifling the game.

But Luton's lack of attacking edge was made all the more painful with Friday's sale of Thorpe.

For a paltry £50,000, Luton's Division Two rivals have pinched a vital part of Luton's starting 11. Although, no doubt a relief to have the club's top earner off the wage bill, it certainly seems - football-wise - as a step sideways for former fans' favourite Thorpe.

Coventry City forward, Gary McSheffrey, was drafted in late on Friday on a one-month loan deal.

McSheffrey - who holds the record for the youngest ever player in the Premiership - went straight in to the starting line up, replacing Thorpe. Matthew Spring, out with a migraine at Stockport last week, returned meaning Nicholls played out of position on the right side of midfield.

Grimsby, who were relegated from Division One last season,



■ Nicholls chases up

Luton Town 1
Grimsby 2



■ Yet another Hatters penalty claim as Crowe goes down

held up proceedings by ten minutes due to a clash of kits. When kick-off finally arrived the opening 30 minutes were as grey and dull as the Mariners' away strip.

Luton, who were sitting in joint first place at the start of the day, looked lively, but often flattered to deceive. Courtney Pitt - who had a good first half - went on a few pacy runs that lifted the crowd and Steve Howard let rip from 35 yards, but saw his effort sail over.

Then, on 33 minutes, against the run of play, Grimsby finally went over the half way line and managed to score. Combative midfielder Anderson received the ball from a throw in at the edge of the box and held off Kevin Foley and created just enough space for a low drive.

It flew in the bottom corner and the Grimsby players looked almost as stunned as the Kenilworth Road crowd.

The goal obviously went to Grimsby's heads and they twice came close to a second late on.

Captain Stuart Campbell's speculative 40-yard drive clipped the post and Dutch winger Marcel Cas also blasted against the upright.

But Luton still looked by far the better side and, as they trudged off at half time, you

couldn't help thinking that Grimsby were there for the taking.

Newell decided to change things on 65 minutes with the introduction of Dean Crowe for McSheffrey.

Apart from an early booking, the youngster had done OK, but it was asking a lot of him to jump straight in to Thorpe's silver boots.

For all Luton's possession, they just couldn't get past Grimsby's back 11. Bar some lame claims for handball in the area, it seemed that a few of the Luton players were missing the talismanic Thorpe.

Then came the killer blow on 77 minutes when Grimsby somehow got a second. On a counter attack Cas managed to hook a cross in from the byline and forward Michael Bolding put above his marker and placed his header past Beckwith.

As soon as that second went in, some of the Town players looked sorry for themselves and appeared to give up the fight. Not even a consolation goal six minutes' from time could galvanise the Hatters.

Some good passing play between Pitt and Paul Hughes put Crowe through and he was bundled over by defender Simon Ford. After umpteen penalty

appeals it was no surprise to see referee George Cain point to the spot.

Nicholls stepped up and coolly sent Grimsby keeper Aidan Davison the wrong way.

With four minutes added on, Luton surged forward, but true to the rest of the game, lacked a cutting edge up front.

Reflecting on his first defeat as Luton boss, Newell said: "Losing at home is the worst feeling in the world. We had plenty of the game, but it's no good passing the ball around if there's no end product."

Remarking on Grimsby's dour tactics he added: "What they did wasn't entertaining, it really stifled the game - the ref didn't help either."

On his disappointing week, Newell said: "This situation, administration, is dragging on and one or two of the players are quite obviously feeling sorry for themselves. The Tony Thorpe situation was out of my control and there have been no official offers for any more of my players."

But with Thorpe jumping ship this week, Spring linked with Wigan and Howard being pursued by Sheffield Wednesday, Luton fans must be fearing that this is a sign of things to come.



■ New boy McSheffrey gets stuck in

Luton Town): Beckwith, Foley, Coyne, Boyce, Neilson, Nicholls, Spring (Brkovic, 79), Hughes, Pitt, McSheffrey (Crowe 65), Howard. Sub s not used Bayliss, Davis, Brill

Referee: George Cain, Merseyside

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: Nicholls 84 Pen

Grimsby: Anderson 33, Bolding 77

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 5

Grimsby: 2

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 6

Grimsby: 2

CORNERS

Luton: 7

Grimsby: 1

OFFSIDE

Luton: 8

Grimsby: 6

BOOKINGS

Luton: McSheffrey 18

Grimsby: Ten Heuvel 17, Crane 22

ATTENDANCE: 5,827

HATTERS STAR MAN:

Emmerson Boyce - didn't put a foot wrong all afternoon

Division Two results

Barnsley	1	Brighton	0
Bristol City	1	Hartlepool	1
Luton	1	Grimsby	2
Oldham	2	Blackpool	3
Peterborough	0	Sheffield Wed	1
Plymouth	3	Stockport	1
Port Vale	4	Colchester	3
QPR	1	Bournemouth	0
Swindon	4	Notts County	0
Tranmere	1	Rushden	2
Wrexham	1	Brentford	0
Wycombe	3	Chesterfield	3

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Port Vale	3	3	0	0	8	5	9
Sheffield Wed	3	2	1	0	6	4	7
Barnsley	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Wrexham	3	2	1	0	2	0	7
QPR	3	2	0	1	7	2	6
Swindon	3	2	0	1	7	3	6
Luton	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Brighton	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Rushden	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Blackpool	3	2	0	1	6	9	6
Bristol City	3	1	2	0	7	2	5
Hartlepool	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Tranmere	3	1	1	0	5	3	4
Plymouth	3	1	1	1	6	5	4
Wycombe	3	1	1	1	6	6	4
Grimsby	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Peterborough	3	1	0	2	6	5	3
Chesterfield	3	0	3	0	4	4	3
Bournemouth	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
Oldham	3	0	1	2	5	8	1
Colchester	3	0	0	3	3	6	0
Stockport	3	0	0	3	2	6	0
Brentford	3	0	0	3	1	8	0
Notts County	3	0	0	3	0	10	0