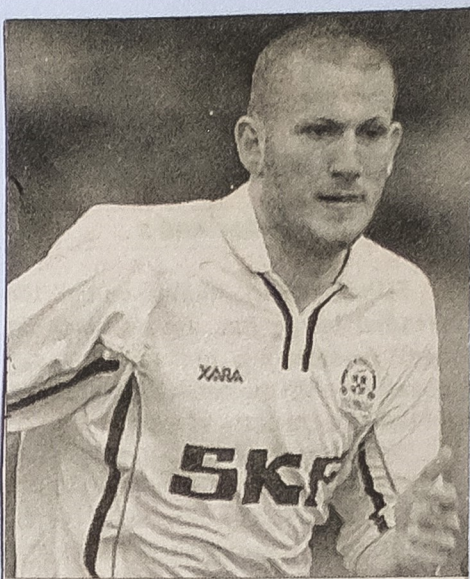




TROUBLED HATTERS

Luton 1 Grimsby 2

03/04

A LATE penalty from skipper Kevin Nicholls (pictured) was not enough to save Luton's 100 per cent record as Grimsby took the points with a 2-1 success for its first win of the campaign.

Iain Anderson had given Grimsby the lead with the first decent shot of the game, a quality strike from just outside the box, and although Luton had plenty of possession, the visitors almost nicked a second when a shot from Marcel Cas hit the top of the crossbar.

The hosts piled on the pressure in the second half but Grimsby defended well and survived several penalty appeals.

They then doubled their lead with a header by Michael Boulding and they held on despite Nicholls' late strike after Simon Ford had brought down Dean Crowe.

Luton manager Mike Newell blamed the club's off-field problems after his side lost.

The club is in administrative receivership and players have been asked to take a pay cut.

Luton missed striker Tony Thorpe who left for QPR earlier in the week in response to wage cuts, but Newell thinks the problems go far deeper than that.

"This is the first time I have seen what is going on at the club affect our players," he said.

"Losing Thorpe hasn't helped but the situation has been dragging on and it showed on the pitch. We had plenty of the ball but didn't go that extra couple of yards to make things happen. We looked as though we were feeling sorry for ourselves."

Grimsby manager Paul Groves said: "I'm very pleased for our supporters and absolutely delighted for the players. In the other games this season they didn't get the rewards they should have got but they did here and they worked very hard.

"Luton put on a bit of pressure in the second half but didn't really trouble our goalkeeper although at times we sat back a little too much and we panicked a little bit. But we made it difficult for Luton and they didn't have many chances."

Groves was not happy with the awarding of Luton's penalty.

"It looked to me as though Ford slid in alongside their man," he said.

"But there was always going to be a penalty — the crowd were baying for them on a number of occasions. Every time there was a block the home crowd claimed for a penalty so perhaps this one was coming."

Newell found some consolation in the debut of 22-year-old striker Gary McSheffrey. Luton are working under a Football League transfer embargo but with a tiny squad were allowed to recruit McSheffrey on loan from Coventry.

"I'm happy with the way he started," said Newell.

"But the situation is hardly ideal, bringing in a new lad when a few team mates are not at the races. He's a decent footballer and showed good attitude but we didn't help him like we should have."