



Hatters Player Watch

Spring's up for the big challenge...

WITH club skipper Kevin Nichols sidelined after his knee operation and with Paul Hughes missing through suspension, the pressure was on Matthew Spring to hold together the Luton midfield against QPR. Spring went into the game after a Star Hatter showing against Plymouth and an impressive showing against Port Vale in the week.

On Saturday he teamed up with 20-year-old Michael Leary in the middle of the park, with the youngster making his first league appearance of the season for the Hatters. Here's how Spring performed:

- Minutes on pitch: 90
- Passes to own player: 22
- Passes to opposition: 2
- Pass completion rate: 92 per cent.
- Shots on target: 0
- Shots off target: 1
- Shots blocked: 1
- Tackles won/interceptions: 6
- Tackles lost: 3
- Free-kicks won: 5
- Free-kicks conceded: 0
- Drabbles ball retained: 5
- Drabbles ball lost: 0
- Drabble completion rate: 100 per cent.
- Headers won: 3
- Headers lost: 1
- Crosses: 2
- Offsides: 1

VERDICT: Spring again produced a neat and tidy performance, helping the Hatters to control possession from midfield. His high pass completion rate and 100% dribble completion rate emphasise how rarely he gave the ball away.

NEWELL'S VIEW: All the players performed well out there today. Spring did well as did Michael Leary. We asked Michael to get about them and put his foot in and take the ball off people and he did that.



I'M BACK! Steve Howard runs away in delight after his deflected shot gave Hatters the lead against QPR.

Picture: JOANNA CROSS

It's not the point, is it?

HATTERS boss Mike Newell admitted his side would probably look back at Saturday's draw with Queens Park Rangers as a point gained against one of the division's strongest sides.

But Luton fans and players couldn't help but feel utterly dejected after former Watford forward Paul Furlong grabbed an injury-time equaliser to cancel out Steve Howard's strike on the hour.

What made the nature of the leveller even more sickening for the home supporters was the flick-on from ex-Luton striker Tony Thorpe that gave Furlong the chance to outstrip home skipper Chris Coyne and slide the ball past the impressive Robert Beckwith.

The return of Thorpe, who was among the Rs' substitutes, and the inclusion of three former Watford players in the QPR starting 11 gave the clash with Luton's close rivals added spice.

And an electric atmosphere was generated by 8,339 fans cramming into Kenilworth Road - the Town's highest gate of the season by some way. Luton were boosted by the return of top scorer

Good show but late goal agony

Howard, who replaced Adrian Forbes up front, and Newell also handed a first start of the season to 20-year-old Michael Leary. He shone after stepping in for the suspended Paul Hughes.

Courtney Pitt, who followed Gary McSherry by signing on for a second month's loan last week, started on the bench having only just overcome an Achilles and hamstring problem.

Referee Uriah Rennie, known for his colourful officiating in the Premiership, wasted no time in leaving his mark on the game by booking David Bayliss after just two minutes.

A scrappy opening then followed until the game burst into life after 15 minutes. Paul Furlong's headed goal from Kevin McLeod's cross was disallowed for offside and the Hatters immediately raced upfield where McSherry volleyed superbly tipped around the post by Chris Day. Luton controlled the

game from then on with McSherry coming closest to breaking the deadlock when his 25-yard free-kick struck the top of the bar in the 37th minute.

QPR, by contrast, registered their first attempt on target three minutes before the break when Marcus Bean hit a weak shot straight at Beckwith from the edge of the penalty area.

The Hatters continued to dictate the pace after the interval and deservedly took the lead in the 60th minute. Neat build-up played to McSherry playing a short ball to Howard on the edge of the box and the big striker's first-time shot took a deflection off the loan player

to deceive Day for his fifth goal of the season. Day made amends with a fine block from Brkovic four minutes later after the Croat had latched on to McSherry's quick-throw and made space for himself inside the penalty area.

But after the introduction of Thorpe, QPR finally began to threaten. Beckwith brilliantly saved first from Kevin Gallen's 20-yard free-kick in the 84th minute and then from Danny Shitru's far post header in the 88th minute. But there was nothing he could do to prevent Furlong's late, late leveller. **STAR HATTER:** David Bayliss. Strong showing at the heart of defence.

NEWELL'S VERDICT

THE lads are absolutely gutted. We all are really because we had the game won. We should have had it won, but you can't complain because at the end of the day you have to shut up shop and for the second week running we've conceded a 90th minute goal.

We competed with QPR and they're a strong side who are going to be there or thereabouts at the end of the season. But I think we more than

matched them. It takes time for the game to open up when it's physical and competitive and we didn't really get a chance to play, but we didn't give them anything either. We're pleased with the lads and the effort they've put in and they're all sick because they've done well. It's how you react to this that is important and in the cold light of the day we'll probably be pleased with taking a point from a strong side.