



Town Player Watch

Hughes so important to Hatters...

DESPITE a dogged midfield performance by Paul Hughes Luton succumbed to Oldham's superior firepower.

Hughes went into the game after an exhilarating and exhausting 120 minutes against Premiership Charlton in midweek.

On Saturday he was responsible for Hatters' early domination of the midfield, with a series of strong tackles and neat short passing. But lacking the creativity of link men Matthew Spring and Kevin Foley, Luton could not convert Hughes' ball-winning into gilt-edged chances.

Here's how Hughes performed.

- Minutes on pitch: 90
- Passes to own player: 16
- Passes to opposition: 9
- Pass completion rate: 64 per cent.
- Shots on target: 0
- Shots off target: 0
- Shots blocked: 0
- Tackles won/intercepted: 14
- Tackles lost: 6
- Free-kicks won: 0
- Free-kicks conceded: 0
- Drabbles ball retained: 2
- Drabbles ball lost: 1
- Drabble completion rate: 66 per cent.
- Headers won: 7
- Headers lost: 5
- Cresses: 0
- Offsides: 0

VERDICT: Hughes teamed up well with Michael Leary in central midfield, but tired in the second-half after a energy sapping week.

His tackling again proved his importance to Luton's midfield in winning the ball and breaking up the opposition's play.

NEWELL'S VIEW: There wasn't anybody on top of their game. Collectively and individually the performance was poor.



BECKS MISERY: Hatters whiz-kid keeper Robert Beckwith gets his marching orders after handling outside the area. Picture: GARETH OWEN

A tale of two Athletics!

HATTERS boss Mike Newell admitted his side were suffering from a cup hangover after watching them slump to their heaviest defeat of the season.

But he refused to use the epic midweek encounter against Premiership club Charlton Athletic as an excuse for his team's failure to perform against cash-hit Oldham Athletic.

Despite a lacklustre performance Luton did not look like a side that should have been three goals down after 47 minutes, but lacking the killer touch they allowed the in-form Latics to stretch their unbeaten run to six games.

The epic eight-goal Carling Cup clash four days earlier took its toll on Newell's line-up at Boundary Park, with defender David Bayliss likely to be out for six months with a ruptured Achilles, and Matthew Spring and Kevin Foley forced out after sustaining knocks.

And the Hatters' manager was given a further selection headache for tonight's league match against Swindon as goalkeeper Robert Beckwith was sent off for 70 minutes for handling outside the box.

Oldham add to Luton cup woe

In an uninspiring first-half both Luton and Oldham struggled to settle into a passing rhythm and offered little threat in the final third of the field.

But former Hatters favourite, Latics boss Iain Dowie, was gifted a head start, after the assistant referee decided Michael Leary had tugged John Eyre's shirt in the box.

Veteran midfielder and ex-Irish international John Sheridan, called back to the Oldham squad this summer after a year in retirement, slotted the resulting 30th minute penalty past Beckwith to give Oldham a 1-0 lead.

Despite conceding Luton looked the more dangerous side, but on the verge of half-time winger Courtney Pitt's goal line cross was cleared before it could reach the waiting Ahmet Brkovic and Hatters could sense it was going to be one of those days.

With cash-strapped Luton having recently benefited from the effects of

on-loan whiz-kids Gary McSheffrey and Courtney Pitt, it was ironic that fellow paupers Oldham doubled their lead in first-half injury time thanks to their own teenage super-temper.

On-loan Newcastle United reserve team regular, 18-year-old Congolese striker Calvin Zola, had troubled Luton's defence with his towering 6'3" frame all afternoon and his efforts were rewarded on 45 minutes as, unmarked, he headed home Dean Holden's cross.

The final blow was delivered just two minutes after the break when Luton failed to clear the lines after two quick corners and Holden rifled in off the

inside off the post from nine yards out to make it 3-0.

Badly exposed for all three goals Beckwith pulled off a fine one-handed reaction save to prevent ex-QPR midfielder Paul Murray adding a fourth goal 10 minutes later with a thunderous volley.

But rattled by the pressure Beckwith incurred a 70th minute red card, charging down an incoming ball to handle outside the box and hand replacement.

17-year-old former Lea Manor school boy Dean Brill his league debut.

STAR HATTER: Chris Coyne. Did his best to marshal a tired team.

NEWELL'S VERDICT

I'M NOT going to use Charlton as an excuse and we can't take anything positive out of today's game at all.

The game was flat with no atmosphere and the linesman gifted them a penalty. But with the way we were playing that goal might not have made any difference anyway.

He gave the penalty for a tug in the box. I think the linesman was the only one in the ground who saw it; there wasn't an appeal from

either the fans or the players. It's always difficult when you have a performance as good as we gave against Charlton the other night and have to make three changes.

With Beckwith, I don't understand what a keeper is supposed to do in those situations. The ball's hit in his hand and he's off. You see it every week; I don't understand what the kid's supposed to do. It's one of those stupid rules.

Oldham		Luton		When Scored For/Avg		When Scored For/Avg		Luton Town's Scorers		Seasonal Progress Chart		Last 5 Matches		Swings	
Sheridan 30 (pen)		Zola 45		6 yd		4 2		Gary McSheffrey		Position		Opponents		Won when behind	
Act On Target		Positives		18 yd		9 10		Steve Howard		August		Oldham		Lost when ahead	
Act Off Target		Negatives		Outside		1 3		Tony Thorpe		September		QPR		Drown when ahead	
6		Cheng		18 yd		1 3		Kevin Foley		October		Port Vale		Drown when ahead	
Act On Target		Holden		Outside		1 3		Chris Coyne		November		Plymouth		Set Piece Goals	
6		Hillier		Outside		1 3		Kevin Nichols		December		Notts County		Scored from Corners	
10		Hillier		Outside		1 3		Alan Neilson		January		Hartlepool		Scored from Free Kicks	
Offsides		Hughes		Outside		1 3		David Bayliss		February		Notts County		Conceded from Corners	
12		Murray		Outside		1 3		Courtney Pitt		March		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Sherrin 14		Leary		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		April		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Eyre 74		Zola		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		May		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Zola		Howard		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		June		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Eyre		McSheffrey		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		July		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Sherrin 14		Pitt		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		August		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
none		Beckwith		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		September		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Cockburn 74		Beckwith		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		October		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	
Cockburn 74		Beckwith		Outside		1 3		Matthew Spring		November		Hartlepool		Conceded from Free Kicks	