



Marlon heroics salvage a point

**Colchester 1
Luton Town 1**

HATTERS reached the halfway stage of the season with a hard-earned point at fellow-promotion chasers Colchester.

Winger Lee Mansell's well-struck equaliser just before the half-hour mark ensured Luton stay in the play-off hunt going into the New Year before today's game against strugglers Notts County.

But it was goalkeeper Marlon Beresford who deserved the plaudits, pulling off a string of saves that kept Colchester at bay in the last 15 minutes – the shot-stopper reminding Hatters fans of his worth the same week he signed a new month-long contract.

It was a double bonus for Beresford, who atoned for last week's late mistake that gifted Barnsley all three points at Kenilworth Road with a commanding presence between the sticks.

Manager Mike Newell kept faith with the same 11 that went down 1-0 to the Yorkshiremen and described the defeat as a 'wake-up call' his side would have to learn from if they were to harbour promotion ambitions.

Sadly for Newell too many of his side seemed to have hit the 'snooze' button in the opening 20 minutes against United.

Colchester, who last season narrowly avoided the drop and lost 5-0 to the Hatters in the corresponding fixture, have been the division's surprise package this term and in the opening exchanges showed Luton they were in fifth place on merit.

A good, passing side they took just seven minutes to register their first attempt on goal – Kemi Izzet (brother of Leicester's Muzzy) flashing his header just wide from a free kick.

Five minutes later Hatters – obviously still in the spirit of giving – left forward Scott McGleish unmarked and paid the price. His strike partner Wayne Andrews delivered a decent cross from the right that flew past two Luton defenders leaving Beresford exposed to the diving header of McGleish who gladly accepted his gift.

Luton were looking sluggish although youngster Kevin Foley was exempt from criticism. He looked lively going forward supporting the attack and it was his left foot shot on 21 minutes that signalled a Luton fightback.

Seven minutes later Mansell fired home the Hatters' equaliser. Hatters were pressing forward

in numbers when the ball fell to Matthew Spring on the edge of the box. His effort looked to be going wide but a fortunate ricochet off Colchester captain Andy Myers presented Mansell with a clear sight of goal. There was certainly nothing fluky about the finish as the winger drilled home his third goal of the season from ten yards.

Neither side offered much up to half-time – Colchester running out of steam and Hatters taking time to get to grip with the game.

Luton had Beresford to thank for going in with honours even when he dived bravely at the feet of Andrews whose pace gave the defence trouble throughout.

Early in the second half Luton were keeping possession easily but found making the killer-pass a lot harder. A tame Foley header on 72 minutes was all the fruit they had to show for Adrian Forbes' endeavours who turned in a committed display up front despite a lack of service.

Forbes blotted his copybook with a silly caution for dissent on the hour-mark. It was the only booking that whistle-happy referee Joe Ross got right as he took down no fewer than six players' names in a game that wasn't bad-tempered in the slightest.

Rebound

The final quarter of an hour was Colchester's but they couldn't find a way past Beresford.

He saved at the feet of Andrews again as the pacy forward pounced on a rebound, dived low to his left to keep out an Andrews header, when it looked goalbound, and in the last minute he held well from Liam Chilvers' stinging 30-yarder.

Newell reflected: "It's a difficult place to come but I'm happy with the way we applied ourselves.

"Their chances were because of our faults. For all the territory we had in the second half we didn't create many chances, so the result was fair."

Commenting on today's match at Kenilworth Road, Newell added: "We want to beat Notts County and have four points from the Christmas period which will keep us with the chasing pack."

Newell is hoping the club will soon be out of receivership.

"For about four weeks now we've been told we'll be coming out of it so when that happens the club can push forward," added the Hatters boss.

Hatters fans will hope when money becomes available to Newell he'll sign Beresford for life (... well a couple of seasons) and not just for Christmas.



■ Take that: Lee Mansell drives in the equaliser



■ Adrian Forbes tussles for the ball

Luton Town: Beresford; Foley, Boyce, Coyne, Davis; Mansell (Holmes 88), Spring, Robinson, Brkovic; Howard, Forbes. Subs not used: Brill, Hillier, Crowe, Showunmi

Referee: Mr Joe Ross (London)

GOALSCORERS:
Colchester: McGleish (12)
Luton: Mansell (28)

SHOTS ON TARGET
Colchester: 5
Luton: 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Colchester: 9
Luton: 3

CORNERS
Colchester: 6
Luton: 5

OFFSIDE
Colchester: 6
Luton: 2

BOOKINGS
Colchester: Pinault (70)
Luton: Coyne (7), Davis (44), Brkovic (45), Forbes (63), Howard (80)

ATTENDANCE: 5,083

HATTERS STAR MAN:
MARLON BERESFORD –
Succession of vital saves kept Luton in the game

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plymouth	23	13	7	3	50	25	46
QPR	22	11	9	3	43	20	42
Barnsley	23	11	7	5	32	27	40
Brighton	23	11	5	7	36	25	38
Bristol City	23	9	10	4	29	19	37
Colchester	23	10	6	7	27	29	36
Port Vale	22	10	5	7	30	28	35
Wrexham	22	10	4	8	25	22	34
Luton	23	9	7	7	35	35	34
Blackpool	22	10	3	9	27	29	33
Hartlepool	23	8	8	7	34	30	32
Rushden & D	23	9	5	9	39	36	32
Bournemouth	23	8	8	7	28	27	32
Swindon	23	8	7	8	31	29	31
Tranmere	23	7	8	8	24	32	29
Grimsby	22	7	7	8	28	31	28
Oldham	23	6	9	8	36	37	27
Sheffield Wed	23	6	9	8	26	30	27
Brentford	23	8	3	11	25	35	27
Peterborough	23	5	8	10	28	34	23
Stockport	23	4	9	10	28	38	21
Notts County	23	5	6	12	22	37	21
Chesterfield	23	3	9	11	18	30	18
Wycombe	23	3	7	13	24	40	16

Division Two results

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