## Golchester have to settle for a point

Boxing Day stalemate felt more like a defeat for high-flying U's

**By Carl Marston** 

HALF-WAY through the season and Colchester United, despite yesterday's failure to beat Luton Town, can still take heart from their lofty position and current points tally.

The U's are usually facing up to a relegation battle, going into the second half of the season. Not so this term. In the play-off zone, and with 36 points from 23 games, represents a tale of festive cheer.

Phil Parkinson's men have advantage, especially late on. set such high standards, over without a feeling disappointment last night.

United preserved their Plymouth and QPR. unbeaten record in December,

## **COLCHESTER UNITED 1, LUTON TOWN 1**

Scott McGleish broke the deadlock with a powerful were level at the break, header in the 12th minute. It was his 11th goal of the season, two more than he managed taken the lead, conceded a

The U's lead lasted 16 minutes. Lee Mansell's smart for the Hatters, although their hosts had numerous minutes. He was crudely opportunities to regain their

The Division Two play-off the last few months, that it was race is certainly hotting up, impossible to leave Layer Road with at least 13 teams in the of current shake-up, and that's not including the two pace-setters

United look well-equipped to

but they had the chances to see stay in contention, and they off visiting Luton Town. A draw should not be too daunted by was scant reward for their tomorrow's clash with QPR at Loftus Road.

Yesterday, although the sides Colchester had good reason to be disappointed. They had throughout the whole of last fortuitous equaliser and then spurned a terrific chance to regain the lead.

Wayne Andrews, finish salvaged a battling point mastermind behind the opening goal, threatened first on eight scythed down by Hatters skipper Chris Coyne, on the right edge of the penalty area.

It was not unlike Alan White's challenge on Eifion Williams at Hartlepool last weekend.

On that occasion, White was shown the red card, forcing the U's to hold out for 87 minutes with just 10 men, which they

Coyne, though, escaped with a booking - that was the correct punishment, but it must have been frustrating for White!

Rowan Vine swung over the ensuing free kick and Kem Izzet's delicate header flashed only inches wide of the far post.

The U's were in front just a minute later. Andrews charged down the right flank and delivered a pinpoint cross for McGleish to stretch forward and head home into the bottom corner of the net.

Luton, despite some prolonged possession, made little headway during the early stages, albeit for Steve Howard's downward header from Sol Davis' cross which bounced off the turf for Simon Brown to gather under his bar.

Yet, the visitors took full 42nd minute. Andrews was poach the equaliser in the 28th minute, thanks to Mansell's clinical finish.

Matthew Spring's rather wayward shot was hurtling well wide until it took a wicked deflection off Andy Myers. The

right-midfielder Mansell, who five times in a short space of kept his composure to beat time. Brown with a ferocious low Craig Fagan did spring the

palming away Andrews'

Goalscorer McGleish, the

recipient of Andrews' excellent

delivery, repaid the favour with

Beresford, who blocked with

his legs.

drive into the far corner of the offside trap in the 67th minute. net. It was Mansell's third goal Birmingham City loanee Fagan, of the campaign. in the starting line-up because United could have restored of an injury to Karl Duguid in their lead before half-time. training on Christmas Day, Vine had a goalbound shot chipped the ball over Beresford, blocked by left-back Davis in who had advanced to the right the 36th minute, and shortly edge of the penalty area.

afterwards keeper Marlon But the ball rolled harmlessly Beresford had to improvise in across the face of goal, with Andrews unable to apply a stinging shot from an acute finishing touch.

Manager Phil Parkinson replaced goalscorer McGleish with new recruit Jamie Cade in an exquisite through ball in the 74th minute – it was only Cade's second appearance since advantage of a slice of luck to away and clear, only to fire his his move from Middlesbrough shot straight at the onrushing in late November.

The first 20 minutes of the Colchester winner. Fagan's lob free kick by Liam Chilvers. second period produced no from a tight angle caused goalmouth action, just a spate mayhem as back-tracking in a neat U's move, in the final

The U's were queing up to take advantage of the halfhearted clearance, but Thomas Pinault missed his kick and Izzet's effort was blocked.

Andrews, without a goal in seven matches, must have fancied his chances when defeat. Vine's shot ricocheted into his path in the 79th minute. Beresford was rapidly off his line to narrow the angle, and hunt, and ensures more Andrews could not squeeze his excitement in 2004. toe-poked shot on target.

The luckless Andrews was pushed wide.

In fact, Beresford was a busy man late on. He fingertipped a rising header from Vine over Seconds later and a comedy the bar, and then showed good of errors almost led to a handling to catch a long range

Substitute Cade was involved of fouls and offsides - the U's keeper Beresford collided with minute of normal time, which

only a foot wide following Sam Stockley's cross.

Whereas a draw at Hartlepool, when down to 10 men, felt like a win, yesterday's stalemate felt more like a

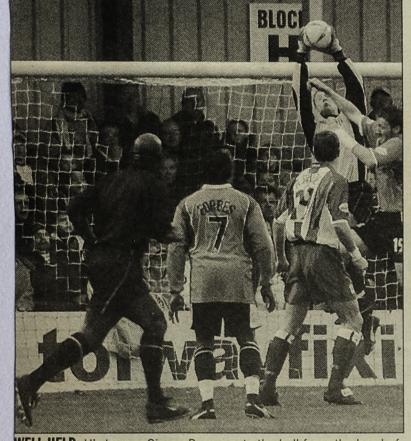
But a point from each fixture keeps the U's in the promotion

Colchester: Brown, thwarted again in the 83rd Stockley, Myers, Chilvers, minute as he met Fagan's cross White, Pinault, Izzett, Fagan, with an effort that Beresford Vine, Andrews, McGleish (Cade 74)

> Luton: Beresford, Foley, Davis, Boyce, Coyne, (Holmes Mansell Robinson, Spring, Brkovic, Howard, Forbes

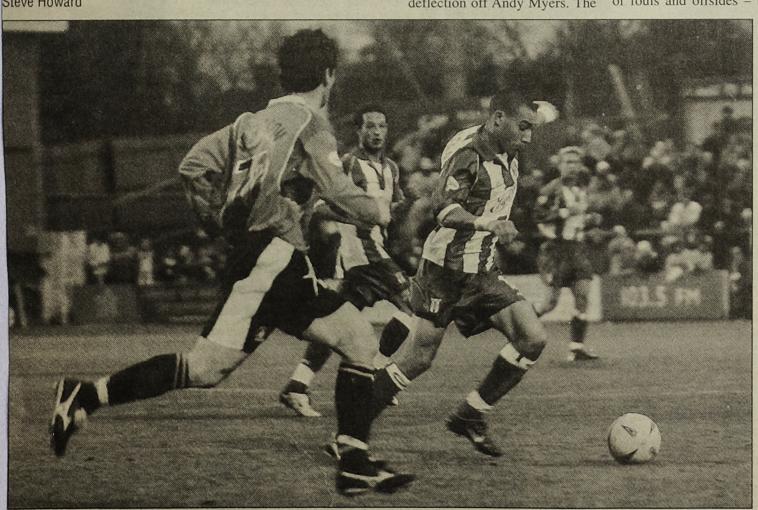
Referee: J Ross (London)





WELL HELD: U's keeper Simon Brown gets the ball from the head of Steve Howard

RUNNER: Craig Fagan attacks the Luton defence



LOAN STAR: Liam Chilvers, on loan from Arsenal against Luton's Steve Howard