## Points dropped, but still hats off to U's

Halfway through the season and bidding for a play-off place



HALFWAY 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 set such high standards, over the last few months, that it was impossible to leave Layer Road without a feeling of disappointment last night.

United preserved their unbeaten record in December, but they had the chances to see off visiting Luton Town. A draw was scant reward for their endeavours.

Scott McGleish broke the deadlock with a powerful header in the 12th minute. It was his 11th goal of the season, two more than he managed throughout the whole of last season.

The U's lead lasted 16 minutes. Lee Mansell's smart finish salvaged a battling point for the Hatters, although their hosts had numerous opportunities to regain their advantage, especially late on.

The Division Two play-off race is certainly hotting up, with at least 12 teams in the current shake-up, and that's not including the two pace-setters Plymouth and QPR.

United look well-equipped to stay booking – that was the correct punin contention, and they should not be too daunted by tomorrow's clash with QPR at Loftus Road.

Yesterday, although the sides were

Cold	neste
1 Brown	6
25 Stockley	6
2 Myers	6
18 Chilvers	7

18 Chilvers 19 White 6 Pinault 10 Izzett 12 Fagan 16 VINE 8 Andrews 9 McGleish

McGleish 12 mins

Pinault (70, dissent)

ATTENDANCE: 5,083

edge of the penalty area.

they achieved.

trating for White.

DATE: Friday, December 26, 2003

level at the break, Colchester had

good reason to be disappointed. They

had taken the lead, conceded a fortu-

itous equaliser and then spurned a

behind the opening goal, threatened

first on eight minutes. He was

crudely scythed down by Hatters

skipper Chris Coyne, on the right

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

ishment, but it must have been frus-

ing free kick and Kem Izzet's delicate

Rowan Vine swung over the ensu-

Wayne Andrews, the mastermind

terrific chance to regain the lead.

**Bookings** 

Goals

Substitutes 3 Keith (not used) 4 Johnson

(not used) 5 Fitzgerald (not used) 11 Cade (for McGleish, 74 mins) 31 McKinney (not used)

29 Beresford 41 FOLEY 24 Davis 17 Boyce 12 Coyne 32 Mansell 11 Robinson

**Luton Town** 

4 Spring 18 Brkovic 19 Howard 7 Forbes

Goals 4-4-2 ......Formation ......4-4-2 Mansell 28 mins 7 .......5 Bookings 9 .......Shots on target .......4 Coyne (8, foul); Davis (45, foul); Brkovic (45, foul); Forbes (63, dis-

15 ......18 0 .......Hit woodwork .......0 **VENUE: Layer Road** 

PITCH: Good surface

the far post.

corner of the net.

under his bar.

Coyne, though, escaped with a Mansell's clinical finish.

header flashed only inches wide of

later. Andrews charged down the

right flank and delivered a pinpoint

cross for McGleish to stretch for-

ward and head home into the bottom

possession, made little headway dur-

Davis' cross which bounced high off

the turf for Simon Brown to gather

a slice of luck to poach the equaliser

shot was hurtling well wide until it

Myers. The ball spun kindly into the

path of right-midfielder Mansell,

took a wicked deflection off Andy

in the 28th minute, thanks to

The visitors took full advantage of

ing the early stages, albeit for Steve Howard's downward header from Sol

Luton, despite some prolonged

The U's were in front just a minute

REF: Mr J Ross (London) **WEATHER: Breezy** 

sent); Howard (80, foul)

who kept his composure to beat Brown with a ferocious low drive

Substitutes

16 Showunmi

(for Mansell, 88 mins)

33 Brill

(not used)

34 Crowe

(not used)

(not used)

23 Hillier

(not used)

27 Holmes

into the far corner of the net. It was Mansell's third goal of the campaign. United could have restored their

'Coyne, though, escaped with a booking - that was the correct must have been

punishment, but it frustrating for White'

goalbound shot blocked by left-back Davis in the 36th minute, and shortly afterwards keeper Marlon Beresford had to improvise in palming away Andrews' stinging shot from an acute angle.

of Andrews' excellent delivery, repaid the favour with an exquisite through-ball in the 42nd minute. Andrews was away and clear, only to fire his shot straight at the onrushing Beresford, who blocked with his

period produced no goalmouth action, just a spate of fouls and offsides - the U's front-line were caught offside five times in a short space of

Craig Fagan did spring the offside trap in the 67th minute. Birmingham City loanee Fagan, in the starting line-up because of an injury to Karl Duguid in training on Christmas Day, chipped the ball over Beresford, who had advanced to the right edge of the penalty area. But the ball rolled harmlessly across the face of goal, with Andrews unable to apply a finishing touch.

Manager Phil Parkinson replaced goalscorer McGleish with new recruit Jamie Cade in the 74th minute - it was only Cade's second appearance since his move from

Seconds later and a comedy of errors almost led to a Colchester winner. Fagan's lob from a tight

			8.9	0	-	1000		10
	Plymouth		13	7	3	50	25	46
	QPR	23	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		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		7	8	8	24	32	29
	Grimsby	22	7	7	8	28	31	28
	Oldham	23	6	9	8	36	37	27
	Sheff Wed	23	6	9	8	26	30	27
	Brentford	23	8	3	12	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

Goalscorer McGleish, the recipient

legs. The first 20 minutes of the second

Middlesbrough in late November.

Matthew Spring's rather wayward lead before half-time. Vine had a angle caused mayhem as back-tracking keeper Beresford collided with his skipper Coyne at the near post.

> The U's were queueing up to take advantage of the half-hearted 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 Vine's shot ricocheted into his path in the 79th minute. Beresford was rapidly off his line to narrow the angle, and Andrews could not squeeze his toe-poked shot on target.

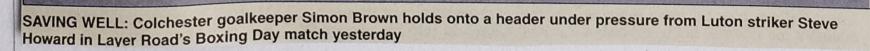
The luckless Andrews was thwarted again in the 83rd minute as he met Fagan's cross with an effort that Beresford pushed wide.

In fact, Beresford was a busy man late on. He finger-tipped a rising header from Vine over the bar, and then showed good handling to catch a long-range free kick by Liam Chilvers.

Substitute Cade was involved in a neat U's move, in the final minute of normal time, which ended with Vine hooking a shot 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 defeat.

But a point from each fixture keeps the U's in the promotion hunt, and ensures more excitement in 2004.



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