Talk of the Town with Andy MacKenzie

NEIL BEFORE ME: Hatters defender Alan Neilson beats Clark Carlisle to the ball at Loftus Road on Saturday as Martin Rowlands watches.

Nico inspires Hatters

Town Player Watch

Underwood debut over too quickly

NEW signing Paul Underwood went straight into the Hatters' starting 11 against Queen's Park Rangers on Saturday.

But the former Rushden & Diamonds man's debut was cut short when he had to be replaced early on through a hamstring strain.

Substitute Peter Holmes fared little better, making way nine minutes before half-time with a knee problem. Here's how both fared at Loftus Road...

- Minutes on pitch: 19 (Underwood)/17 (Holmes)
- Passes to Luton: 0/2
- Passes to QPR: 0/1
- Tackles won: 2/2
- Tackles lost: 2/1
- Free-kicks won: 0/0
- Free-kicks conceded: 1/0
- Headers won: 3/0
- Headers lost: 1/0
- Shots on target: 0/0
- Shots off target: 0/0
- Shots blocked: 0/0
- Dribbles ball retained: 0/0
- Dribbles ball lost: 0/1
- Crosses: 1/0

VERDICT: Neither player had long enough to make any impression on the game, particularly as QPR dominated the early exchanges and both found themselves performing defensive duties on the left-side of midfield.

Underwood didn't even have time to get involved in any passing moves and found himself mainly competing for tackles and headed duels before his departure.

Holmes enjoyed only a little more possession and was also kept busy defending.

NEWELL'S VERDICT: "Paul Underwood strained his hamstring, which is usually a minimum of 10 days out, and Holmesy twisted his knee. "Until we get them looked at it's impossible to say how long they'll both be. We'll have to see how they're looking in the week."

QPR 1 HATTERS 1

KEVIN NICHOLLS donned the Hatters' captain's armband for the first time in seven months and inspired Luton to a second half fightback at fierce rivals Queen's Park Rangers.

Injury-plagued Town were forced into making three changes in the first 36 minutes – including fit again Kevin Foley replacing substitute Peter Holmes who had himself come on for debut man Paul Underwood.

But despite falling behind to Paul Furlong's header on the stroke of half-time, reshuffled Luton bounced back in the second period and grabbed a deserved point through Enoch Showunmi's seventh goal of the season 14 minutes from time.

Club skipper Nicholls was the catalyst for the improved second-half, dominating proceedings from his favoured position in the centre of the park.

But the 25-year-old insisted his determined showing had nothing to do with regaining the skipper's armband in the absence of Aussie Chris Coyne.

Nicholls told The News-Gazette: "It's always an honour captaining your side no matter what level you are at. But at the end of the day it's the gaffer's decision and I've got no problem who it is.

Town earn QPR point

"I just thought the lads played ever so well getting back into it in the second-half and I honestly thought we should have won the game.

"With the players we had missing and after the injuries in the first half, I thought the young lads that came in did the club proud."

Along with some other strong performances, Nicholls and centre midfield partner Steve Robinson dragged Hatters back into the game when the momentum had been heading the home side's way at half-time.

And Nicholls said: "It was nice to be in the middle, but I'm happy to be playing anywhere. People know that right midfield's not my natural position, but I've done a job there and I don't think I've disgraced myself.

"But this has probably come at a bad time for me really because I miss the next three games through suspension.

"It's frustrating, but that's football. I just hope the lads can keep it going and with our home form I don't see why we can't."

As well as the injured Coyne, Town were also missing Steve Howard before the game. And they were soon further depleted when Underwood, Hughes and Holmes all limped off in the first-half.

QPR threatened first when Morten Hyldgaard pushed Martin Rowlands' 20-yarder around the post in the 25th minute. And Kevin Gallen nipped in behind Keith Keane three minutes later, but saw his low shot blocked by Hyldgaard's legs.

Furlong's 25-yard free-kick was parried by the Town's Danish stopper a minute later. But Luton almost scored from their first real attack in the 41st minute when Emmerson Boyce met Ahmet Brkovic's deep cross and looped a header over QPR keeper Lee Camp, only for Clark Carlisle to clear acrobatically off the line.

QPR took the lead when Showunmi lost possession on the right and the ball broke to Gallen who had time to pick out Furlong to nod home at the far post.

But backed by a vociferous 3,000 strong travelling support Hatters hit back. Showunmi's shot was pushed away by Camp in the 50th minute and two Nicholls efforts were well blocked by Camp in the 63rd and 65th minutes.

The equaliser came when Adrian Forbes nodded on Brkovic's long punt and Showunmi brushed aside Carlisle before hooking the ball over Camp from the left side of the penalty area.

STAR HATTER: Kevin Nicholls. His sense of urgency lifted his fellow teammates.

MIKE NEWELL'S VERDICT

"I DON'T think anybody can deny that we deserved to get something out of the game considering what we had to do first-half substitution wise.

"We've played the top two within a week, one of them with only 10 men for half the game, and we've matched them.

"You can't ask for anything more than that – I'm so proud of my players.

"We ended up playing with two players who have only had about 10 days of training between them in Kevin Foley and Adrian Forbes.

"It's not ideal, but a lot of players have had to do that this season and they keep giving us everything."

HATTERS

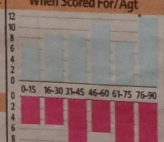
QPR	1-1	Luton
Furlong 45	Showunmi 76	
Camp	Hyldgaard	Att On Target
Bignot	Underwood 19	5
Cronhere	Davis	Att Off Target
Carlisle	Boyce	1
Edghill	Neilson	Corners
Bean 82	Keane	4
Johnson	Robinson	Offsides
Rowlands	Hughes 35	6
Furlong	Nicholls	Fouls
Gallen	Brkovic	17
McLeod	Thorpe 72	Booked
Rowlands	Showunmi	none
McLeod 72	Holmes 19	Sent Off
none	Cureton 82	none
Day	Forbes 35	Ref
Palmer	Foley 36	D'Urso
17,695	Brill	
	Ainsworth	Manzelli

Where Scored For/Agt	
6 yd	18
18 yd	24
Outside 18 yd	7

How Scored For/Agt	
Shots	17
Headers	18
Volleys	6
Penalties	5
Free Kicks	1
Own Goals	2

Hk Goals KOB in ... Goals AGAINST in ...

When Scored For/Agt



Goals in last 10 mins			
Goals Scored	6	Goals conceded	10
Points won	3	Points lost	12

Luton Town's Scorers

	Lge	CC	FA	LDV	Tot	Gms	Gls/Gm
Adrian Forbes	9	0	5	0	14	23	0.61
Steve Howard	9	1	0	0	10	32	0.31
Gary McSheffrey	8	1	0	0	9	19	0.47
Enoch Showunmi	6	0	0	1	7	22	0.32
Emmerson Boyce	3	0	1	0	4	42	0.10
Tony Thorpe	2	1	0	0	3	3	1.00
Peter Holmes	3	0	0	0	3	20	0.15
Lee Mansell	2	0	1	0	3	21	0.14
Kevin Foley	1	2	0	0	3	29	0.10
Steve Robinson	2	0	1	0	3	32	0.09
Chris Coyne	2	1	0	0	3	44	0.07
Russell Perrett	2	0	0	0	2	6	0.33
Kevin Nicholls	2	0	0	0	2	17	0.12
Matthew Judge	0	0	0	1	1	2	0.50
David Bayliss	0	1	0	0	1	7	0.14
Alan Neilson	1	0	0	0	1	12	0.08
Courtney Pitt	0	1	0	0	1	14	0.07
Michael Leary	0	0	0	1	1	15	0.07
Paul Hughes	1	0	0	0	1	24	0.04
Matthew Spring	1	0	0	0	1	30	0.03
Ahmet Brkovic	1	0	0	0	1	35	0.03

Seasonal Progress Chart

Fouls & Offsides	
Avg Fouls/game	13.35
Div 2 Rating	19
Avg Offside/game	4.59
Div 2 Rating	24

Rating of 1 = team gave away least fouls/offsides in div and 24 = most

Top Scorers in each Category

Headed Goals	3 players 2	Volleyed shots	4 players 1
Long Range Shots	Howard, McSheffrey 2	Penalties scored	Nicholls 2
Inside 6 yards	Coyne, Perrett 2	Scored 1st Goal	Howard 5
Shots 6-18 yards	Forbes 6	Gls in Last 10 mins	6 players 1

Last 6 League Games

Opponents	H/A	Score
QPR	A	1-1
Plymouth	H	1-1
Port Vale	A	0-1
Blackpool	H	3-2
Barnsley	A	0-0
Peterborough	A	2-1

Swings

Won when behind	3
Drawn when behind	5
Lost when ahead	3
Drawn when ahead	6

Set Piece Goals

Scored from Corners	6
Scored from Free Kicks	8
Conceded from Corners	5
Conceded from Free Kicks	5

Attendance Figures

Highest Attendance	8,499
Lowest Attendance	5,002
Ave Attendance	6,236

There's only one thing that makes fully grown men whimper like a lost ...
Relegation.