



■ Hokey cokey: Above McSheffery shaking it all about. Top right, Coyne puts his right foot in.



Unbeaten Hatters still top of league

04/05

Tranmere Rovers 1 Luton Town 1
TOM LEECH reports from Prenton Park



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town: Seremet; Foley, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic, Robinson, Nicholls, Underwood; Vine, McSheffery
Subs (not used): Brill, Keane, Leary, Showunmi, Blinkhorn

Referee: Tony Bates (Staffordshire)

GOALSCORERS:
Tranmere: Taylor 32
Luton: Coyne 76

SHOTS ON TARGET
Tranmere: 4
Luton: 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Tranmere: 4
Luton: 3

CORNERS:
Tranmere: 4
Luton: 3

OFFSIDE
Tranmere: 1
Luton: 3

BOOKINGS
Tranmere: Dadi 45, Hall 64, Roberts 79, Sharps 87
Luton: Coyne 31, Nicholls 31, Vine 66, Brkovic 72

ATTENDANCE: 10,884

HATTERS STAR MAN:
Chris Coyne
Battling performance typified by the Australian's matchwinner

LUTON Town showed just how much their unbeaten record means to them as they came from behind to draw in yesterday's ill-tempered top of the table clash.

Neither side shone as first played second and no fewer than eight players were booked, but Hatters ensured a share of the spoils when Chris Coyne's second half header cancelled out Rovers' controversial penalty.

Manager Mike Newell didn't hold back as he laid into the penalty decision - and then the retake call from the referee's assistant. "For Tranmere to go ahead like that was annoying and frustrating. Our players are saying that their man went down without being touched.

"And to then get the penalty retaken because Dino moved was just petty, I thought. He wasn't five or six yards off his line as the penalty was taken - he was one or two."

But Newell had only praise for his match-winner. "Coyne was magnificent today - both with his goal and in defence. He's the kind of player who gives you everything. But then they all did today. The unbeaten record means a lot to them, they just won't be beaten."

Luton were forced to make two changes to the side that beat Peterborough last week.

Suspension robbed him of top scorer Steve Howard so on-loan Gary McSheffery came in for his first start of the season to line up alongside fellow loanee Rowan Vine. Marlon Beresford picked up a groin injury during the 2-1 win so substitute Dino Seremet started a full 90 minutes in the Luton net.

After the Posh game Newell warned Hatters fans that Tranmere would present his side's toughest opponent yet - and they soon showed why.

On 27 minutes a poor clearance from Seremet put the Hatters under undue pressure and eventually led to the penalty - but that wasn't to come for another five minutes. Rovers' full back Ryan Taylor was clean through on the overlap after being played in by Paul Hall who capitalised on Seremet's mistake. He burst into the box, too quick for Curtis Davies who sent him tumbling and gave referee Tony Bates no choice but to award the spot kick. Luton were livid and argued the point with Mr Bates along with Tranmere whose penalty taker Taylor had been taken off the pitch and wasn't allowed to return under the letter of the law until the penalty had been taken.

Iain Hume stepped up but saw his low drive well saved by Seremet, only for the linesman to order a retake claiming the Slovenian moved before the ball was kicked. Referee Bates then brought Taylor back on in time for the second attempt and the resulting argument cost Nicholls and Coyne a booking each. Seremet even saved

Taylor's initial shot but the right back bundled home the rebound to give Rovers a half time lead.

On the balance of play it was deserved as Howard-less Hatters disappointed. McSheffery and Vine couldn't breach Rovers' defence but they weren't helped by their team-mates' poor delivery. Hatters' diminutive strikers were never going to win the succession of long balls that were pumped into the box - the kind that Howard thrives on.

The second half didn't bring the expected urgency in Luton's play - not that Tranmere looked like extending their lead, although substitute Calvin Zola should have done better from 10 yards after getting a clear run on goal from Hall's through ball on 71 minutes.

It was too close for Luton and five minutes later man of the match Coyne rescued the draw and Hatters' unbeaten record with his first goal of the season. Still in the Tranmere box from a corner moments earlier, Coyne peeled to the back post and his run was picked out by captain Nicholls who planted the ball on his head.

The home side piled on the pressure late on and Luton were thankful for some more wayward finishing from Tranmere's substitute - Zola by name, but not Zola by nature. He had two more chances late on, the best was a one on one with Seremet which he screwed wide, and made sure Hatters' remain the football league's number one club.