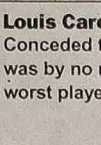


Player watch

BRISTOL CITY

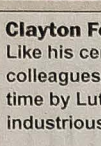
Formation: 3-5-2



Louis Carey 5
Conceded the penalty but was by no means City's worst player



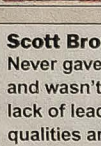
Danny Coles 4
Struggled to cope with Howard and gave away too many free-kicks



Clayton Fortune 4
Like his central defensive colleagues, given a torrid time by Luton's industrious forwards



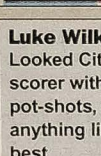
Jamie Smith 5
Tried hard to lead by example in the face of a losing battle



Scott Brown 4
Never gave up the chase and wasn't helped by a lack of leadership qualities around him



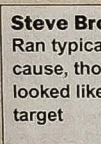
Tony Dinning 3
Struggled to take a grip on the midfield, his early withdrawal saying it all about his manager's thoughts



Luke Wilshire 5
Looked City's most likely scorer with a couple of pot-shots, without being anything like his creative best



Mickey Bell 5
Tried in vain to raise City's game with some determined left-sided running before injury ended his day



Steve Brooker 5
Ran typically hard for the cause, though seldom looked like hitting the target



Leroy Lita 4
His most frustrating afternoon yet. Was never at the races, although not helped by poor service

Star man



Steve Phillips 6
made some fabulous saves to keep the score down to five

Substitutions

Luton: Enoch Showunmi (for Davis, 56) 6
Calvin Andrew (for Vine, 82)
Michael Leary (for Holmes, 82)
Not used: Dino Seremet, Leon Barnett
City: Bradley Orr (for Dinning, 28) 5
Cole Skuse (for Coles, h-t) 5
Marc Goodfellow (for Brown, 60) 4
Not used: Paul Heffernan, Dave Cotterill

Senior players under fire after City cave in to leaders



04/05

Under the cosh: Paul Underwood fires a shot towards the City goal as Jamie Smith slides in too late

'Shocking' display

CITY have suffered some wretched days down the years, just as they have enjoyed plenty of high points in the grim battle to get out of League One.

Remember the 5-1 drubbing at Blackpool on April 13, 2002?

It's hard to recall, though, an afternoon in which they were so utterly outplayed and devoid of all industry and guile — and against a team who, man for man, should never have been THAT much better.

The League One table, and Saturday's desperate result, suggests otherwise.

Over the course of the campaign City's away record has been admirable. And there was the promising little spell of goal-filled home successes between the end of August and mid-November when all roads appeared to lead to an exciting, promotion-chasing adventure.

Every team have their peaks and troughs, but the reality is, City have looked plain ordinary — and worse — on far too many occasions this term.

If it's not a mental thing — and as we well know, confidence is everything where the Robins are concerned — then, as a unit, this team simply aren't good enough, regardless of the apparent individual talent within the ranks.

We all expected Luton to come out of the blocks with gusto after their slip-up at Port Vale the previous weekend. What we didn't bank on was that Brian Tinnion's side would be blown down so easily in the face of Luton's whirlwind approach.

City may have enough games left to salvage a top-six berth, IF they get their act together pronto. And it's fair to say they had shown

encouraging signs before the dire second-half display against Blackpool.

Instead of bouncing back from that, however, City simply continued where they had left off at Ashton Gate seven days earlier. For all Steve Howard's aerial abilities, Ahmet Brkovic's invention and Paul Underwood's drive down the left, Luton should never have been THAT dominant.

Tinnion is desperate to get it right and he pledged again to ensure he would succeed. No-one doubts his appetite to achieve the overdue prize.

Something, though, has to be fundamentally wrong for City to find themselves in the position they are in. It could simply be that the quality and commitment on the field is not as good as as it is so often cracked up to be, or maybe better coaching is required.

By the same token, a string of past failures and a stack of changes on and off the field might just be proving too much for a club so anxious to appease its expectant fans.

In short, City are not performing as a team their high standing and reputation in the lower divisions should be.

And that's in no way decrying the sterling efforts of youngsters like Leroy Lita, whose astonishing goal return has spared City from further embarrassment on occasions, just as Steve Phillips' heroics at times have done.

It said it all about Tinnion's intense frustration on Saturday that he threatened to pitch more young faces into the fray over the next few weeks, at a time when the play-offs are still attainable — just.

What that said of his thoughts about the senior professionals he is desperately seeking inspiration from in his hour of need, only he

knows. "It was a shocking performance and it's hard to look for positives," said the manager.

"We were second to every ball and we couldn't handle them."

"It was hard to believe these were the same players that beat Colchester and Oldham so well, and enjoyed a great first half against Blackpool."

"The players have to take more responsibility. During the first 25 minutes we didn't win any first balls and we gave away silly free-kicks. Everything we asked the players not to do they did."

"We couldn't handle their front men or midfield and they were better than us in all areas by a country mile."

"We weren't good enough and it hurts. But it's gone. We have a full week to get together and focus on getting it out of our system and getting it right for Barnsley on Saturday."

City were under the cosh from the word go and the only surprise come the interval was they weren't trailing by more than three goals.

Howard had twice hit the bar with the one shot two minutes in as he looked to bury strike partner Rowan Vine's pull-back, while Underwood's thumping header from Brkovic's centre was only just wide of the far post before the Croatian struck on 10 minutes.

Underwood skipped deep down the left flank before cutting the ball back perfectly for Brkovic to steal a march on his markers — the Hatters were first in the duels far too often — and beat the under-fire Phillips with a searing finish.

As the one-way traffic continued, Phillips leapt athletically to his left to prevent Howard's majestic header creeping past him, before City were staring at a two-goal deficit.

LUTON

- (4-4-2)
Marlon Beresford 6
Keith Keane 7
Russell Perrett 8
Curtis Davies 8
Sol Davis 7
Ahmet Brkovic 9
Kevin Nicholls 8
Peter Holmes 7
Paul Underwood 8
Steve Howard 8
Rowan Vine 7



Match Facts

14	Shots on target	2
4	Shots off target	0
9	Corners	4
17	Fouls conceded	25
4	Offsides	8

Attendance: 8,330

Atmosphere



Entertainment



Goals

Luton: Brkovic 10, 80; Nicholls (pen) 26; Davis 45; Holmes 61
City: None

Bookings

Luton: Underwood, timewasting, 46; Howard, foul, 57
City: Fortune, foul, 19; Carey, foul, 26; Coles, foul, 31; Orr, foul, 72; Brooker, foul, 73

Referee

Paul Danson ... too fast to the book