

It's elementary for Holmes as Rhys slips

LUTON

Nicholls (13 pen), Brkovic (27), Holmes (84)

SWINDON

Proctor (34)

By Chester Stern

LUTON manager Mike Newell celebrated signing a new contract with another win in his side's inexorable march towards the Championship. But the three points were hard won by the runaway leaders as Swindon proved stubborn opponents with promotion ambitions of their own.

'Teams aren't going to come here and just lie down,' said Luton assistant manager Brian Stein. 'We've had to tell the players you can't play champagne football every week, and this was a battling performance. We're delighted with the win after they came to stifle us but this squad now play for each other. It was a team effort.'

In the end it was a howler from Swindon goalkeeper Rhys Evans which broke their resistance. The Welshman dropped a simple cross as the feet of Peter Holmes, who walked the ball in for Luton's third goal six minutes from the end.

Swindon's coach, the former Luton favourite Mick Harford, said: 'Rhys is a good goalkeeper. He's absolutely devastated because it was a horrendous mistake. But we all make them. It was a pity because we totally dominated the game possession-wise and when we went behind the players responded magnificently.'

With former champion jockey and Swindon fan Willie Carson watching from the directors' box, it was Luton who began like a racehorse bolting from the starting stalls.

The League One leaders were ahead after 13 minutes when Ahmet Brkovic was bundled over needlessly just inside the area and skipper Kevin Nicholls drove a superb spot-kick into the bottom right-hand corner.

Brkovic put Luton further ahead 14 minutes later when a neat turn in the box by Holmes left Matthew Heywood floundering and as the ball ran free, Sol Davis drove it back into a crowded area for the Croat midfielder to stab home from eight yards.

But Swindon showed why they are pushing for a play-off place with a resolute fightback prompted by Sammy Igoe's vision and gritty ball-winning. They pulled a goal back when

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	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Luton	37	23	9	5	68	36	78
Hull	37	23	6	8	68	42	75
Sheff Wed	37	18	11	8	68	45	65
Tranmere	36	18	11	7	58	43	65
Bournemouth	37	17	9	11	66	48	60
Hartlepool	36	18	4	14	60	52	58
Brentford	34	16	7	11	41	44	55
Bristol City	37	13	14	10	60	49	53

Michael Proctor rose above the defenders to head home a Grant Smith corner, and moments later Luton keeper Marlon Beresford had to tip over a goalbound header from Swindon's top-scorer Sam Parkin.

Swindon played five across the middle and the extra man began to tell as they mounted wave after wave of attacks towards half-time.

It made for an exciting spectacle but Luton defended in numbers



IT'S A GIFT:

Rhys Evans drops the ball and Peter Holmes cashes in to give Luton their third goal

Picture:
FRANCES LEADER

and kept their goal intact. Proctor was booked for a cynical foul on Davis when the wing-back burst on to a pass from Nicholls and was through on goal.

Nicholls shaved the post from the free-kick and the impressive Paul Underwood hit the bar a few minutes later. After their five-goal demolition of promotion-hopefuls Bristol City last week Luton might have anticipated a similar romp but Swindon always seemed to find a man in space.

In added-time Curtis Davies had to be alert to scramble an effort from Parkin away in front of his goalkeeper but by then Luton had the points in the bag.

LUTON (4-4-2): Beresford; Keane (Leary 80min), Perrett, Davies, Davis; Brkovic (Foley 72), Nicholls, Holmes, Underwood; Howard, Vine (Showunmi 72). **Subs** (not used): Seremet, Barnett. **Booked:** Nicholls.

SWINDON (3-5-2): Evans; O'Hanlon, Heywood, Ifil; Jenkins, Igoe, Miglioranza (Holmes 77), Smith, Duke; Parkin, Proctor (Roberts 67). **Subs** (not used): Howard, Reeves, Book. **Booked:** Heywood, Proctor.

Referee: F Graham (Essex).