



ANTTI NIEMI

7



Pulled off some marvellous saves. Perhaps a question over the third, but the marking was awful.

RORY DELAP

5



Looked out of place at right back. Tried hard but, positionally, didn't seem comfortable.

TOMASZ HAJTO

6



A powerful presence. Tried to play long passes with some sort of accuracy.

DARREN POWELL

5



Was just trying to cope with aerial threat of Steve Howard.

DANNY HIGGINBOTHAM

6



Had a great first half hour but couldn't keep it up in terms of going forward.

MATT OAKLEY

5



Popped up with a decent finish for his goal but otherwise found it tough going.

DENNIS WISE

5



Didn't see enough of the ball to really get involved sufficiently.

NIGEL QUASHIE

5



Looked out of sorts.

DAVID PRUTTON

5



With Higginbotham combined well initially, but then faded.

KENWYNE JONES

6



Was willing and got himself a goal for his hard work.

RICARDO FULLER

5



Didn't look like he was going to score.

SUBSTITUTES

Theo Walcott (Prutton 62) 5
Not so effective on the left wing as up front.

Dexter Blackstock (Jones 67) 6
Was busy and bustling.

Unused: Paul Smith, Martin Cranie, Djamel Belmadi.

Saints resort to long-ball tactics and



Order no: rad45bec.

HEAD OF THE CLASS: Kenwyne Jones outjumps Luton keeper Dean Brill to head home Saints' second. Echo pics: Gordon Agg-Jones.

Brittle confidence is

Order no: rad95f37.



JOY: Saints skipper Nigel Quashie soon had the smile wiped off his face.

CONFIDENCE, unlike quality, is one thing that can't be bought in football.

And while Saints look short of both at the moment, it is the former that could ultimately prove more problematic than the latter.

If anybody wanted to know what life in the Championship was about, then this was it – and Saints didn't respond well.

A small, dated ground, playing a team of modest quality but with lots of heart in a tight, fight of a match.

They'd better get used to it quick because there's plenty more of it to come.

What is worrying in Saints' first two games of the season is the way in which they've played, rather than the results.

It doesn't seem as if they have shaken that wretched losing feeling, that dismal habit that was so prevalent last season.

Instead, if anything, it appears the rot has almost got worse in some of the players.

Against Luton it just seemed as if Mike Newell's side, on the opposite end of the spectrum after promotion last season, simply believed in themselves more.

Saints looked scared in possession; scared of making mistakes.

That can be the only reason the ball was pumped long from back to front so often.

Again, you got the impression that a few players didn't want to be out there.

It wasn't that there was a conscious lack of effort from the team.

More that these mental demons seem to eat away at some of them during matches and they just can't shake them.

Though on paper Saints do have better players than Luton, they do also lack some quality as well as confidence.

If chairman Rupert Lowe thought Saints would bounce back out of this division without decent investment, he must now know – after just 180 minutes of the new campaign – they won't.

More quality is required before the end of the transfer window but attracting players to a Championship club on comparatively low wages is a hard sell to say the least.

Saints probably need a defender but desperately need a wide midfielder and a 20-goal striker.

Ricardo Fuller is still settling in

but doesn't look like being the man to get those sort of goals.

Kenwyne Jones has played a bit better alongside him, but ditto.

With Brett Ormerod suffering from his virus, the siren-like calls for Theo Walcott to start may become deafening.

In a mark of how far Saints have slipped, a 16-year-old probably IS the best option to give things an added dimension up front.

The midfield spent plenty of time last night watching the ball sail over their heads but, nevertheless, rarely got to grips with the game themselves.

Though there are four excellent midfielders in there, it does look very unbalanced with effectively four central players trying to cover the wide positions as well.

It is still very early days in the season, but at the moment the signs aren't good.

That sinking feeling is still there and how it's repaired is hard to say.

Saints do need to conjure up some decent signings – even if it costs a few quid more in wages than Lowe was hoping to spend.

Harry Redknapp's team should have got the better of Luton, but the Hatters were worthy winners.

Saints took the lead on 18 minutes

GOALS

LUTON	SAINTS
Nicholls 41	Oakley 18
Brkovic 52	Jones 45
Morgan 90	

ATMOSPHERE

What few fans can fit into Kenilworth Road were right behind their team. 8/10

ENTERTAINMENT

Plenty of goals and excitement. 8/10

ATTENDANCE

9,446

HARRY'S WORDS

When you get to injury-time away from home and you are drawing, you have to make sure you don't get beat.



end up beaten fairly and squarely...



Order no: rad0f838.

HOUSE OF GLOOM: Harry Redknapp looks lost for words as he watches Saints concede an injury-time third from the dug-out.

already resurfacing

against the run of play – Antti Niemi having already made a string of good saves – when David Prutton and Danny Higginbotham combined on the left and Matt Oakley stole into the area to slam the ball home.

It was 1-1 on 41 minutes when some neat interchange play saw Kevin Nicholls score.

But in first-half injury-time, a defensive mix-up allowed Jones to head home Rory Delap's cross for his first-ever Saints senior goal.

With an undeserved 2-1 half-time lead, you expected Saints to come out more composed, having weathered the storm and to see out the match.

Instead, they ended up losing.

Seven minutes after the re-start, Ahmet Brkovic headed home from a free-kick – worryingly similar to the number of free headers from set-pieces Saints conceded last season.

Then, in injury-time, Dennis Wise was beaten by Dean Morgan, who curled a shot into the top corner.

Redknapp, and Lowe, need to find a solution to this early crisis of confidence.

It is early days but last season proved that, when the rot sets in, it's almost impossible to shift.



Order no: radee625.

HIGH FIVES: Matt Oakley celebrates his goal on 18 minutes.

VERDICT:

Luton were deserved winners in a disappointing display from Saints, who are already showing worrying signs of having the same brittle confidence and lack of belief that saw them relegated. They must put this right soon.



Adam Leitch



STAT ATTACK

HIGHLIGHT

Niemi's fantastic first-half save.



LOWLIGHT

A performance lacking in confidence and conviction.



HOW THEY STAND

COCA-COLA CHAMPIONSHIP

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Sheff Utd	2	2	0	0	6	2	6
2 Luton	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
3 Plymouth	2	1	1	0	5	4	4
4 Crewe	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
5 Preston	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
6 QPR	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
7 Wolves	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
8 Reading	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
9 Leeds	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
10 Cardiff	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
11 Ipswich	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
12 Leicester	2	1	0	1	5	6	3
13 Derby	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
14 Norwich	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
15 Coventry	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
16 Hull	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
17 Sheff Wed	2	0	2	0	1	1	1
18 Watford	2	0	1	1	4	5	1
19 SAINTS	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
20 Millwall	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
21 Stoke	2	0	1	1	2	4	1
22 Brighton	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
23 Burnley	2	0	0	2	2	4	0
24 Crystal Palace	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

COMING UP

COCA-COLA CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, August 12
Cardiff v Watford (7.45pm).

Saturday, August 13 (3pm)
Brighton v Crewe, Burnley v Coventry, Leicester v Ipswich, Luton v Leeds, Millwall v Stoke, Norwich v Crystal Palace, Plymouth v Derby, Preston v Reading, QPR v Sheff Utd, Sheff Wed v SAINTS, Wolves v Hull.

LUTON



DEAN BRILL

5

Was badly caught out for Saints' second.



KEVIN FOLEY

7

Impressive display at right back defending well and getting forward throughout.



CURTIS DAVIES

7

Put in a huge amount of heart and effort and did well.



MARKUS HEIKKINEN

6

Solid and steady for the most part.



PAUL UNDERWOOD

6

Got forward well from left back and kept Walcott in check when he came on.



AHMET BRKOVIC

7

Took his goal well and was always busy.



STEVE ROBINSON

7

Got about the pitch well and broke up the play.



KEVIN NICHOLLS

8

Really made Luton tick and scored a good goal. Impressive.



DEAN MORGAN

7

Superb injury time winner and was decent throughout.



WARREN FEENEY

6

Always busy and causing problems.



STEVE HOWARD

6

His height made him a tough opponent.



SUBSTITUTES

Enoch Showunmi (Feeney 88)

Unused: Dino Seremet, Russell Perrett, Peter Holmes, Rowan Vine.

BAD BOYS

LUTON
Booked: Nicholls, Davies.

SAINTS
Booked: Hajto, Wise.

REFEREE

6

STEVE BENNETT
A few dodgy moments but, overall, did alright.

