SAINTS

ANTTI NIEMI

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



RORY DELAP

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



TOMASZ HAJTO

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



Darren Powell

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



DANNY HIGGINBOTHAM

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



MATT OAKLEY

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



DENNIS WISE

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



NIGEL QUASHIE

Looked out of sorts.



DAVID PRUTTON

With Higginbotham combined well initially, but then faded.



KENWYNE JONES

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



RICARDO FULLER

Didn't look like he was going to score.



SUBSTITUTES

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

Dexter Blackstock (Jones 67) Was busy and bustly.

Unused: Paul Smith, Martin Cranie, Djamel Belmadi.

CHAMPIONSHIP: LUTON 3 SAINTS

Saints resort to long-ball tactics and



Brittle confidence is



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 later.

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 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 posses- but doesn't look like being the

sion; 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 con-

scious lack of effort from the More that these mental demons seem to eat away at some of them

can't shake them. Though on paper Saints do have better players than Luton, they do also lack some quality as well as

during matches and they just

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

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 Nicholls 41 **Brkovic 52**

SAINTS Oakley 18 Jones 45 Morgan 90

ATMOSPHERE

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

ENTERTAINMENT

Plenty of goals and excitement.

ATTENDANCE

9,446

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



end up beaten fairly and squarely...



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 \(\Gamma\) 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 weath-

ered the storm and to see out the match.

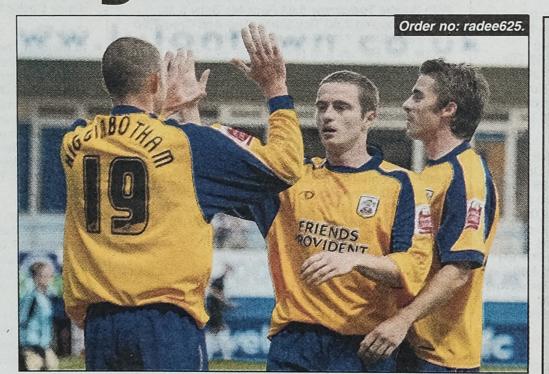
Instead, they ended up losing.

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

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

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.



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.



STAT ATTACK

HIGHLIGHT

Niemi's fantastic first-half save.



LOWLIGHT

A performance lacking in confidence and convic

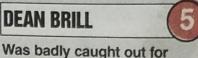


LUTON





Saints' second.





KEVIN FOLEY



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



CURTIS DAVIES

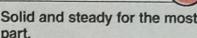


Put in a huge amount of heart and effort and did well.



MARKUS HEIKKINEN







PAUL UNDERWOOD



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



AHMET BRKOVIC



Took his goal well and was always busy.



STEVE ROBINSON



Got about the pitch well and broke up the play.



KEVIN NICHOLLS



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





DEAN MORGAN Superb injury time winner and



was decent throughout.

HOW THEY STAND

COCA-COLA CHAMPIONSHIP

Sheff Utd

Plymouth

Luton

Crewe

QPR Wolves Reading Leeds

10 Cardiff 11 Ipswich

13 Derby

16 Hull

12 Leicester

14 Norwich

15 Coventry

17 Sheff Wed

18 Watford

19 SAINTS

22 Brighton

23 Burnley

Wolves v Hull.

20 Millwall

21 Stoke

Preston

PWDL

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2 2 0 0

2 1 1 0

2 1 1 0

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2 0 1 1

2002

24 Crystal Palace 2 0 0 2 2 4 0

COMING UP

COCA-COLA CHAMPIONSHIP

Friday, August 12

Saturday, August 13 (3pm) Brighton v Crewe, Burnley v Coventry,

Millwall v Stoke, Norwich v Crystal Palace,

Leicester v Ipswich, Luton v Leeds,

Plymouth v Derby, Preston v Reading,

QPR v Sheff Utd, Sheff Wed v SAINTS,

Cardiff v Watford (7.45pm).

6

5 3

5

3

3

1 3 1

2 4 0

2 6









Always busy and causing problems.



STEVE HOWARD



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



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

