

HOLMES SEALS HATTERS WIN

Cardiff1
Luton2

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HIGH-FLYING Luton further strengthened their position among the front-runners by ending Cardiff's eight-match unbeaten run.

Peter Holmes' second half winner handed Luton three points, after Dean Morgan's first

half strike had cancelled out Michael Ricketts' early opener.

It was another wholly deserved victory for Mike Newell's side, who have wasted no time in acclimatising to life in English football's second tier since their promotion in May.

They are showing no signs of relinquishing their position above so-called bigger clubs such as Wolves, Leeds and Southampton.

Their fine start to the season has encouraged hopes that they can climb from the bottom division of league football to the top in five seasons, and this latest success

will serve only to fuel that optimism.

However, it was the in-form Bluebirds who began the brighter — and Ricketts wasted no time stamping his authority on proceedings.

The former Bolton striker, on loan at Cardiff from Leeds until January, opened the scoring with a clinical strike after nine minutes.

After collecting a clever flick-on by teenage strike partner Cameron Jerome, Ricketts struck a low 12-yard shot which fizzed past Luton goalkeeper Marlon Beresford for the third goal of his loan spell at Ninian Park.

But the former England striker was given little sight of goal thereafter as Luton took control.

The Hatters could have been level barely 60 seconds later when Warren Feeney nodded against the bar at the far post.

The visitors began to dominate, and Steve Howard headed narrowly over from Ahmet Brkovic's teasing cross.

Feeney and Howard proved a real menace for Cardiff's defence — and as Luton continued to press, they saw a strong penalty claim turned down when another Brkovic cross looked to have been blocked by Chris Barker's hand.

Referee Michael Jones ignored Luton's vociferous claims, but their equaliser after 30 minutes was controversial too.

Holmes flighted a long ball behind Cardiff's defence which found Morgan completely unopposed but looking suspiciously offside.

However, the Luton midfielder allowed the ball to drop before one swish of his left boot saw it sail past Neil Alexander and nestle in the far corner.

The visitors remained dangerous, and eight minutes after the restart, Holmes' fierce 12-yard shot forced Alexander into an excellent stop.

Holmes was rewarded for his endeavour after 57 minutes when

he struck to hand the visitors a precious winner.

Howard nodded across the face of goal, and Holmes arrived to scramble the ball home from close-range.

Cardiff came back strongly and went within inches of equalising when captain Darren Purse thundered a tremendous volley against the underside of the bar.

The ball bounced down just inches from the visitors' goal line as Luton rode their luck before tearing upfield and hitting the woodwork themselves.

The industrious Feeney played the ball back to Howard on the edge of the box, and he smashed the ball against the post from distance.

A tense finale saw Ricketts nod agonisingly against the frame of post and bar in the last minute, but the resilient Hatters held on for their fourth away win of the season.

Margin didn't reflect Luton dominance

LUTON manager Mike Newell insisted his side fully deserved their victory at Cardiff but was disappointed the margin of victory was not greater.

"We controlled the game and it would have been difficult to take had we not gone away with the three points," he said.

"We had chances to put them out of reach but we weren't quite able to do that."

Bluebirds boss Dave Jones was left to bemoan Michael Ricketts' late miss and said: "I felt that once we scored we should have gone on and imposed ourselves on the game."

"But we just sat back and never really got going until the last 10 minutes, when we should have scored."



PETER HOLMES scores Luton's winner