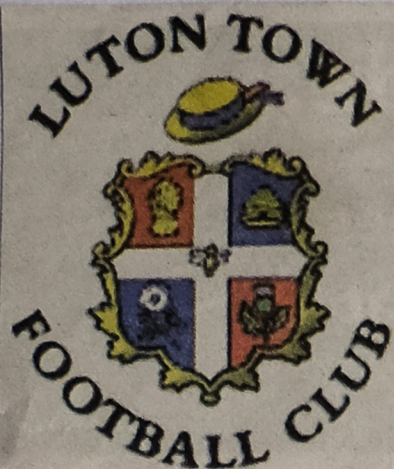




# Luton Town FC

Coventry 1 Luton 0

TOM LEECH reports

from the Ricoh Arena



## Nightmare show from sad Hatters

**LUTON Town aptly chose Halloween weekend to turn in their most horrifying performance of the season.**

High-flying Hatters were a ghost of their normal selves going down to Dele Adebola's headed goal early in the second half.

Worrying for Luton fans was the Coventry end, something boss Mike Newell admitted is halting Hatters' progress.

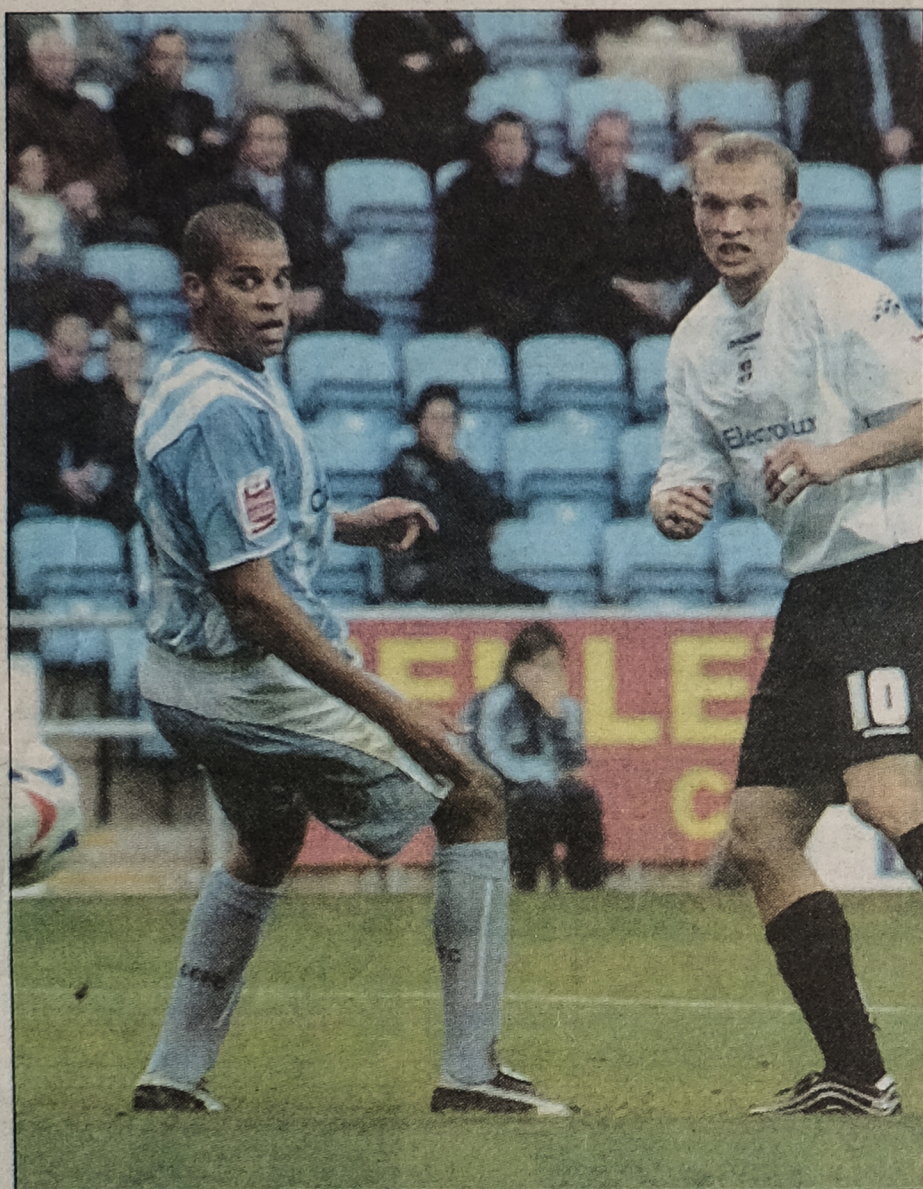
"I don't feel we were second best at all through the game," he said. "But we're struggling to put the ball in the back of the net at the moment."

"Coventry made things difficult and defended with their lives late on which you'd expect from a side struggling at the bottom of the table. Their goal came at a bad time too, almost at the beginning of the second half but I thought we had enough to get back in it – but that wasn't the case."

Newell was forced to make one change from the side that drew with Plymouth last week. The injured Sol Davis was replaced by Kevin Foley who reverted to right back swapping flanks with Carlos Edwards who played out of position on the left. Davis' natural replacement Paul Underwood failed to be fit enough to face City at the impressive Ricoh Arena.

The Hatters boss refused to blame injuries on the defeat. "We've missed key players before and won. We're confident that the squad we've got can cope with this league. The players I've got are more than capable of coming in and doing a job when they're called on. I'm not going to make scapegoats of players who come into the side."

Just like their East Midlands neighbours Leicester, Coventry



■ Hatters' top performer at Coventry – Warren Feeney

– who lost their last home game 4-1 against Crystal Palace – have the world class stadium but not the team.

'World class' is not how you would describe the first half of football at the Ricoh Arena yesterday. The expectant crowd had to wait 40 minutes for the first effort on target – and that was just a daisy-cutter from Steve Howard that never troubled City's on-loan keeper Marton Fulop.

There wasn't too much in between as both sides battled but gave very little entertainment. The Sky Blues best chance of the half fell to Gary McShefferey after just four minutes. The forward who had two spells on loan at Kenilworth

Road over two seasons blazed over from eight yards.

Five minutes later Howard somehow missed from even closer when Chris Coyne headed Edwards' free kick into the striker's path but he acrobatically kneeed it wide.

At the break young full back Keith Keane came on for Dean Morgan and Edwards moved up the pitch but barely two minutes into the second half Luton's makeshift left side were exploited for City's opener. Winger James Scowcroft raced down the flank unchallenged – Newell later said Keane had his shirt pulled preventing him from keeping up – and had time to pick a pass when he got to the byline. He chose Adebola who

couldn't miss from four yards out powering his header into the back of the net.

The goal galvanised Luton into action and almost an immediate response, but Ahmet Brkovic's far post header was saved at point-blank range by Fulop.

The Croatian tried something more spectacular moments later but his overhead bicycle kick lacked the speed to seriously trouble Fulop who punched out to safety.

Adebola turned provider on 55 minutes when his determined run beat markers Coyne and Markus Heikkinen and allowed Michael Doyle a clear sight of goal. Instead of running clean through he chose to shoot from the edge of the box but Marlon Beresford got down well to block.

Luton's patched-up defence took a further knock on 62 minutes when lynchpin Coyne limped off to be replaced by young centre half Leon Barnett.

Barnett coped admirably with the bustling Adebola but Coventry could almost taste their first win in October and were penning Luton in their own half, making it as difficult as possible.

To bolster his attacking options Newell brought on Enoch Showunmi to see if the Nigerian international could break Coventry's resilience.

He almost got a chance to on 79 minutes when Brkovic hooked a ball into the penalty area. But Howard failed to spot his strike partner unmarked behind him and went for goal, looping his header over the bar and wasting Hatters' last real chance of an equaliser.

Next up is another difficult away trip to Bramall Lane to play top-of-the-table Sheffield United and Newell will be expecting a much better display. "We've struggled against the teams lower down the league so I'm not overly worried by Sheffield United," he insisted.



Subs: Keane (Morgan 46), Barnett (Coyne 62), Showunmi (Holmes 77) Subs not used: Brill, Vine

**MAN OF THE MATCH**

**WARREN FEENEY**

Came up against a brickwall in Robert Page but never stopped trying



■ On the ball: Enoch Showunmi



■ Carlos Edwards gets in a shot as Hatters tried unsuccessfully to break through

## Win tickets to see Burnley game



WICKES, the official home improvement suppliers to the Championship, has teamed up with Luton/Bedfordshire on Sunday to offer a lucky reader a pair of tickets for Luton v Burnley next Saturday.

To enter the competition, all you have to do is answer the following question: **Who scored Luton's goal in their recent match with Plymouth?**

Send your answer on a post card or the back of an envelope to Luton FC competition, The Sports Desk, Bedfordshire on Sunday, 22 Mill Street, Bedford MK40 3HD. Please make sure you include your name, address and a telephone number and/or e-mail address at which you can be contacted during the day. Entrants must be aged 16 or over.