

Walcott ends Saints poor run

05/06

Southampton	1
Luton	0

SOUTHAMPTON began life after Harry Redknapp by ending a five-match winless run thanks to a hard-fought 1-0 victory over Luton at St Mary's.

Teenager Theo Walcott enhanced his growing reputation with a stunning first half winner to condemn Luton to a sixth successive defeat on the road.

The 16-year-old, thrown into the first team fray by Redknapp before the manager's departure, lobbed goalkeeper Dean Brill from wide on the left in the 23rd minute to register his fourth goal of the season.

After a frantic opening 15 minutes, the home side had the first attempt at goal, although Brill had all the time in the world to collect defender Darren Powell's hooked effort.

The Hatters conjured up their first effort three minutes later but, after jinking his way into the box, Paul Underwood fired his shot wildly over before striker Steve Howard headed wide from a corner.

Walcott's wonder strike opened the scoring and Southampton almost doubled their lead in the 31st minute, Brill pulling off a fantastic reaction save after Matt Oakley's free kick eluded everyone in the box.

Poland international Kamil Kosowski, on loan from Kaiserslautern, then blazed a decent chance over for the Saints just before half time.

Luton nearly levelled in first half stoppage-time but Rory Delap headed Chris Coyne's overhead kick off the line after Antti Niemi had spilled the ball.

Howard, who has scored just one goal in his last seven appearances, headed a decent opportunity over the bar inside the first minute of the second half.

Walcott had a glorious chance to grab a second in the 56th minute after sprinting clear on goal, but Brill managed to keep out his weak shot.

Southampton almost went 2-0 up in the 67th minute when Neil McCann ran half the length of the pitch before seeing his shot deflected just wide by Markus Heikkinen.

Luton should have levelled with eight minutes left when Howard poorly headed over from Kevin Nicholls' quickly-taken free kick, while Underwood lashed a shot over the crossbar.

Southampton had Delap sent off a minute from time for a second bookable offence.

Delighted Bassett eyes full-time role

DAVE Bassett praised match-winner Theo Walcott as 10-man Southampton edged a nervous encounter against Luton.

And beaming Bassett is now hoping he will be made Southampton boss on a full-time basis.

The caretaker manager said: "Walcott scored a terrific goal and on another day may even have had one or two more.

"People were saying the players would be affected by all that has gone on in the last couple of weeks. I don't think that was the case.

"Footballers are resilient people but this win will have come as a relief to everyone."

Luton boss Mike Newell was unhappy as he felt referee Lee Probert did not let the game flow and used his whistle far too often.

Newell said: "It is difficult to play football when the referee's whistle is being blown every 30 seconds.

"Southampton did to us in the first half what we have been doing to other teams all season.

"But everybody has a bad game and everybody makes a mistake, if we didn't every game would be a 0-0 draw."