

O'Grady slams door on Luton's playoff bid

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FOR whatever reason, Luton Town's form has been increasingly erratic since the turn of the year and where they once had realistic thoughts of reaching the Championship playoffs, it looks unlikely that they will do so now.

If their season could be summed up in one match, this was it. Dreadful at times yesterday they improved in the second half with some superb flowing football, but ultimately conceded a late and unnecessary goal to a Leicester City team improving all the time under manager Rob Kelly.

If anything, this was one fixture that Luton manager Mike Newell would have wanted desperately to win. Constantly linked with the

Luton **1**
Leicester **2**

Rob Maul
at Kenilworth Road

Leicester job following Craig Levein's departure in January — he even spoke to the club twice — it would have been satisfying for him to put one over his critics amid suggestions he will be leaving in the summer if he does not receive adequate transfer funds.

"We did not play anywhere near what we are capable of and did not deserve anything

from the match," said a dejected Newell. "The playoffs are still mathematically possible but we are running out of games."

Lacking both rhythm and understanding in the first half, Luton lost their captain and influential midfielder Kevin Nicholls in the opening minutes when he damaged knee ligaments. They went behind shortly after when Gareth Williams sent a long ball over the Luton defence.

It seemed relatively straightforward to deal with but defender Leon Barnett, playing instead of the injured Markus Heikkinen, slipped 10 yards from the penalty area. This left Matt Fryatt with a clear run on goal and, considering how well he has been playing since he joined

from Walsall in January, he was not going to spurn the opportunity to record his fourth goal for the club.

It was the least that Leicester deserved but, inspired by half-time substitute Warren Feeney, Luton equalised on 53 minutes. Paul Underwood swung in a near-post corner which was flicked on by defender Chris Coyne. Arriving at the back post was Steve Howard, who saw a similar diving header hit the post in the first half, to head in the equaliser.

Yet two minutes before full time Leicester scored a dramatic and deserved winner. Barnett's clearance fell to Andrew Welsh and his scuffed pass to fellow substitute Chris O'Grady was swept into the net. With only one defeat in

Match stats

	Luton	Leicester
Shots on target (incl goals)	4	7
Shots off target	5	4
Blocked shots	0	0
Corners won	7	7
Total fouls conceded	14	13
Offsides	5	3
Yellow cards	2	2
Red cards	0	0
Possession	51%	49%

Player ratings. Luton Town: Beresford 6, Foley 6, Barnett 3, Coyne 5, Davis 6, Edwards 7, Holmes 6, Nicholls 5 (Bell 8min, 6), Underwood 7 (Showunmi 69min, 6), Vine 5 (Feeney 45min, 8), Howard 6

Leicester City: Henderson 7, Stearman 7, McCarthy 6, Kisnorbo 6, Johansson 6, Maybury 6, Williams 7, Gudjonsson 6, Hughes 5 (Welsh 64min, 7), Hume 7 (O'Grady 79min, 7), Fryatt 8

STAR MAN: Matt Fryatt (Leicester City)

Scorers: Luton: Howard 53

Leicester: Fryatt 16, O'Grady 88

Referee: A Bates

Attendance: 9,783

their past eight league matches, Leicester are now 10 points clear of the relegation zone. "Craig [Levein] developed a good camaraderie within the team but we lacked

self-belief and confidence. I have tried to maintain a togetherness because everybody will have to pull together to get out of this situation," Kelly said.