



Luton Town FC

Luton 1 - Leicester 2
TOM LEECH reports
from Kenilworth Road



Slide goes on as Hatters outfoxed

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LATE goals and missed opportunities are becoming synonymous with Luton Town's recent form and against Leicester City it was no different.

Despite a bright start for the Foxes which culminated in Matty Fryatt putting Rob Kelly's side in the lead, Hatters went on to dominate proceedings and were level early in the second half through Steve Howard.

But the inability to turn possession into goals and a lack of confidence at the back allowed Leicester substitute Chris O'Grady to inflict Luton's third straight defeat just three minutes from time.

The game against the in-form Foxes was given added spice when several tabloid newspapers mischievously announced midweek that Hatters boss Mike Newell would be taking over from caretaker manager Kelly at the end of the season.

But it's Kelly's stock that seems to be on the rise with Leicester losing just once in nine games while the Hatters look to be in free-fall.

The play-offs looked a real possibility a few weeks ago but even Newell admits it would be a tall order for the Hatters to sneak that coveted sixth spot.

"I'm disappointed with the display," said Newell who had talks with Leicester at the end of January when Craig Levine was sacked. "We didn't deserve anything. They worked hard and had the better of the first half."

On his side's worrying habit of conceding late goals the Hatters boss reiterated he'd have to bring in some new faces for the next campaign.

"It was happening two years ago and we put a stop to it. This is a different level we're playing at and only better players can make you a better side."

Luton made two changes from the side that went down 2-1 to Millwall last weekend with Leon Barnett and Sol Davis replacing Markus Heikkinen and Ahmet Brkovic respectively.

But after just eight minutes Newell was forced to replace skipper Kevin Nicholls when the midfielder was left floored from a challenge which damaged his knee ligaments effectively ending his season and on came deadline day signing David Bell, only just back from injury himself.

It was a less than ideal return to first team action for Bell as he witnessed Leicester City play Luton off the park in the opening 20 minutes.

If Kelly really is just keeping the seat warm for Newell the Luton boss must have been equally impressed by Leicester and depressed by his own side.

Richard Stearman and Alan Maybury had both gone close before the Foxes drew first blood on 16 minutes through Fryatt. While Leicester's game plan had been attractive to watch, the visitors' goal came from route



one and a touch of fortune as Barnett slipped in attempting to clear Gareth Williams big punt forward allowing Fryatt a clear run at goal. The 19-year-old kept a cool head as he calmly slotted the ball past the on-rushing Marlon Beresford.

Hatters were guilty of some sloppy passing in the opening 45 minutes but one accurate cross on 33 minutes gave Luton some hope before the break.

It was a typical Carlos Edwards delivery from the right and Howard beat his marker to head at Paul Henderson in the Foxes' goal. But on its way it took a deflection off Leicester right back Stearman and hit the inside of the post.

Warren Feeney was introduced for Rowan Vine when the sides ran out for the second half. The Ulsterman almost made an immediate impact on 49 minutes when Howard put him through. The diminutive striker beat the offside trap but over-ran the ball allowing Henderson to dive at his feet.

Four minutes later Hatters equalised when Howard headed in his 101st goal in a Luton Town shirt. Paul Underwood's corner picked out Chris Coyne's run into the box

and the Aussie's flick deceived Henderson allowing Howard to nod in his 13th of another prolific season from close range.

The balance of power had swung in Luton's direction but putting the finishing touch to their siege of the Leicester penalty area continued to elude them. A couple of goalmouth scrambles aside there were no golden opportunities carved out and Hatters had Bell to thank on the hour mark when he cleared off the line after Stearman headed goalwards from a corner giving Luton a scare.

The injury list at Kenilworth Road grew even longer on 68 minutes when Underwood limped off to be replaced by Enoch Showunmi. The Nigerian got the crowd on their feet moments after his arrival when he rode past three Leicester players before whipping his 25-yard shot wide.

However it was Leicester who stole the win on 87 minutes through substitute O'Grady. Fellow sub Andrew Welsh's mis-hit half volley looked to be destined for the corner flag before it hit O'Grady – how much he knew about it was debatable – and the ball bobbled over the line.



Subs: Bell (Nicholls 8), Feeney (Vine 46), Showunmi (68) Subs not used: Brill, Perrett

MAN OF THE MATCH

STEVE HOWARD

Well deserved goal and battled hard



■ In the thick of it: Warren Feeney (above) and Paul Underwood (above left)