

Survival hopes

05/06

New striker scores on debut but Albion are still in deep trouble

ALBION gave a debut today to Gifton Noel-Williams in their bid to end a ten-match run without a win against mid-table Luton.

The relegation-haunted Seagulls borrowed Noel-Williams from Burnley for the rest of the season in a deal completed minutes before Thursday's loan transfer deadline.

Manager Mark McGhee opted for a double-barrelled attack, partnering the former Watford and Stoke targetman with fellow Londoner Colin Kazim-Richards.

The arrival of Noel-Williams relegated Seb Carole to the bench, with Gary Hart reverting to the right wing.

McGhee made one other change to the team which drew at Queens Park Rangers last Saturday, the well-again Joel Lynch returning at leftback at the expense of Adam El-Abd.

Luton made one alteration to the side which ended a run of three straight defeats with a 1-0 home win against Derby last Saturday.

Finnish centre half Markus Heikkinen was back from tonsillitis in place of Russell Perrett.

The opening of the new east stand on a wet and misty afternoon resulted in a near record crowd at Withead, with the vast majority of spectators hoping for Noel-Williams to give the Championship survival battle a desperately needed lift.

Light drizzle had turned into heavy rain by the time the match got under way.

Noel-Williams' first two touches were winning headers and his ability to hold the ball up was also soon in evidence.

An early pass by Albion's new signing almost put away Frutos, Luton's veteran keeper Beresford coming outside his area to clear from the Frenchman.

Howard, Luton's robust leading marksman, caused the first threat from the visitors with a cross-shot which, fortunately for Albion, did not find a colleague.

Noel-Williams had decent claims for a penalty rejected by



BY ANDY NAYLOR
ALBION 1 LUTON 1

referee Paul Armstrong in the 13th minute.

He turned neatly after a cross by Lynch had not been cleared and Coyne, the Luton captain, at the very least appeared to obstruct his path to goal.

The pitch, not surprisingly given the weather conditions, was already cutting up through the middle, making life difficult for both teams.

NOEL-WILLIAMS took just 18 minutes to make a goalscoring mark. He met a right wing cross from Hinshelwood with a glancing header from ten yards which beat the scrambling Beresford to his right.

It was quite a start for the Seagulls' new recruit and completed a hat-trick of goalscoring debuts by Noel-Williams, the 26-year-old having also found the net on his first appearances for both Burnley and Stoke.

Teams are often at their most vulnerable when they have scored and no sooner were Albion ahead than they lost concentration and Luton almost equalised.

Feeney got in behind Lynch down the right to deliver a low cross just out of the reach of his strike partner Howard.

The aerial route, with Noel-Williams very much the target, was proving profitable for Albion as, midway through the half, Butters climbed highest to head over from a Carpenter corner.

Luton, inspite of their deficit and comfortable position in the table, were playing some decent stuff at times.

Albion's marking was slack when McShane went out to the right wing to close down Edwards. The winger simply tucked a pass inside to Underwood, who was unmarked inside the box.

He turned and fired in a low shot which Henderson did well to parry, Butters completing the clearance.

Two minutes later a deep cross from Foley was nodded back from beyond the far post by Feeney for Brkovic to head wide of Henderson's left hand



FLICK ON: Albion midfielder Gary Hart rises for the ball



ON THE RUN: Alex Frutos powers past a Luton opponent during the first half at Withead

are fading

PICTURES: SIMON DACK



AERIAL THREAT: Gifton Noel-Williams wins a header for the Seagulls against Luton during the first half

post. The Hatters had enjoyed the better of the exchanges since Noel-Williams' well-placed header and Albion were having to work hard on an increasingly muddy playing surface to keep them at bay.

Kazim-Richards collected the first caution of the contest in the 36th minute, catching Beresford slightly late as the Luton custodian advanced outside his box to kick clear.

The eighth caution of the campaign for Kazim-Richards was followed by an untidy spell of play, littered with free-kicks.

The game had become bogged down in midfield at this stage and Luton were by now less of a threat as Albion retained their advantage through to the break.

Albion, anxious for the cushion of a second goal, were almost let in early in the second half when Foley dallied from a cross by Hart, enabling Frutos to nearly latch on to the ball.

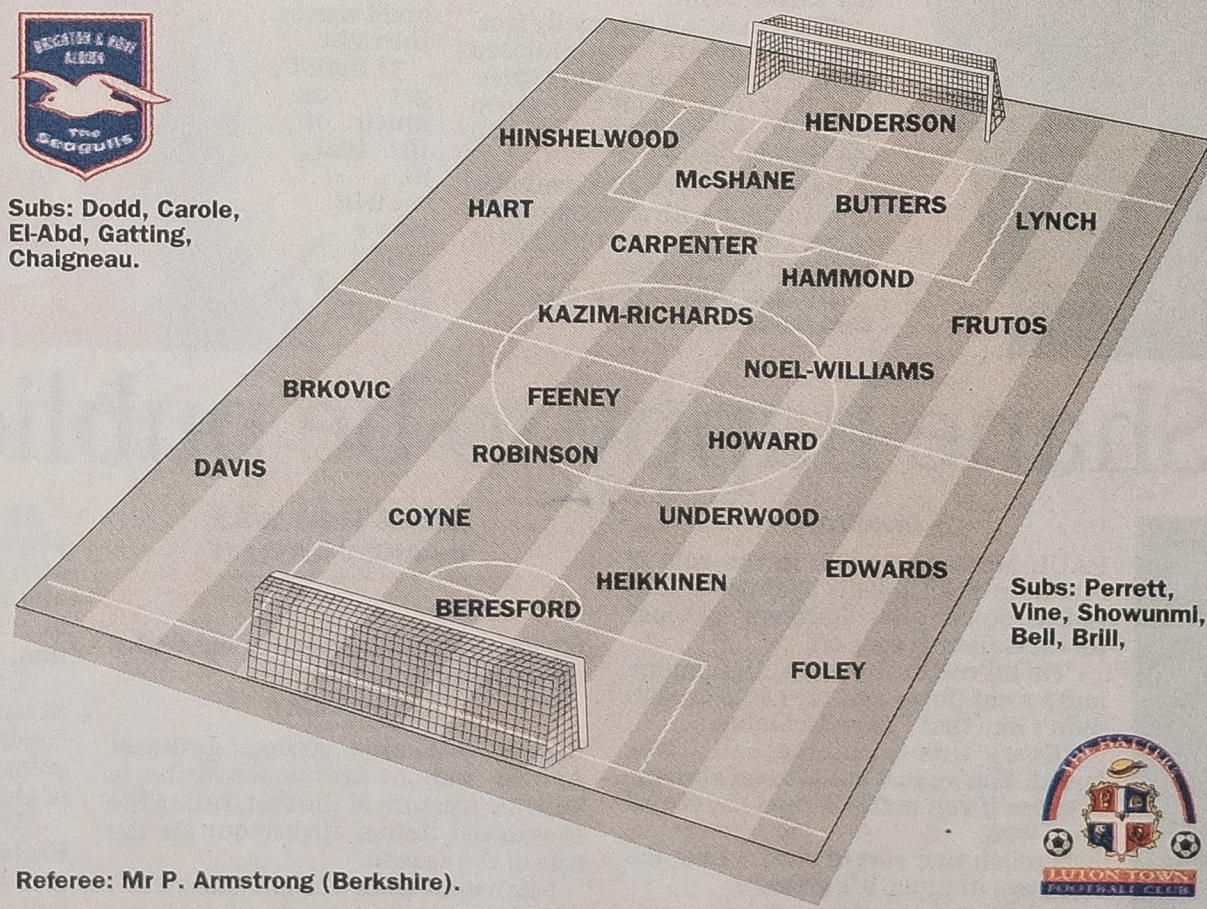
Hinshelwood, having provided the cross from which Noel-Williams headed his first goal since August, produced a saving challenge inside the Albion area when Feeney ran on to a firm header inside from Edwards.

Frutos dipped a shot narrowly over the bar from the edge of the box, then Kazim-Richards combined with Noel-Williams to give Hammond the chance of a shot which was blocked.

Albion's lead evaporated on the hour when the diving Henderson palmed away an angled drive from Feeney, only for the ball to go in with Robinson and McShane in close attention.



Subs: Dodd, Carole, El-Abd, Gatting, Chaigneau.



Subs: Perrett, Vine, Showunmi, Bell, Brill,

Referee: Mr P. Armstrong (Berkshire).



There was doubt as to who got the decisive touch but the goal was credited to Robinson, who was on target in Luton's 3-0 winner at home to Albion at Christmas.

Albion immediately brought on El-Abd for Frutos, the substitute joining the action on the right side of midfield with Hart switching to the left.

Luton made a double change shortly afterwards, bringing on Vine for Brkovic and Bell for

Edwards.

McShane collected the second yellow card of the game for Albion for an over-zealous tackle on Robinson.

The Seagulls brought on Gatting upfront for Kazim-Richards in the 72nd minute and the young sub made an immediate impact, linking up with Noel-Williams to head the ball back for Hart to thump a right-foot volley against the post.

That moment of misfortune

came as news filtered through of unexpected leads for relegation rivals Sheffield Wednesday and Millwall at Wolves and Watford respectively.

Luton made their last change with 15 minutes left, the giant Showunmi taking over from Feeney.

A minute later Noel-Williams found the side netting from a tight angle when Gatting tried to guide a header from Carpenter's cross into his path.