

LUTON

Vine (28pen, 29), Bell (81)

BIRMINGHAM

Campbell (14), Danns (66)

By James Wrigley

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Bell goal sounds a major warning

BIRMINGHAM'S bid for an instant return to the Premiership took a blow at Kenilworth Road, where a spirited revival by Luton left them without a win in four Championship outings.

An absorbing match played at full throttle was eventually settled in favour of Mike Newell's team when substitute David Bell struck the winner nine minutes from the end.

Much more of this and Birmingham boss Steve Bruce may soon be looking over his shoulder. Indeed, he raised an eyebrow afterwards as a radio presenter seated nearby invited a trial by phone-in for the manager.

Ridiculous really, given they had started the day in second. Furthermore, Bruce's men dominated early on, went ahead after 14 minutes through the excellent DJ Campbell and only surrendered that lead when the softest of penalties was awarded against them.

Stephen Kelly was ruled to have held back Lewis Emanuel on the left after 28 minutes and Rowan Vine beat Maik Taylor from the spot. 'It was a bit harsh,' said Newell.

It was referee Jonathan Moss's first Championship game and Bruce is unlikely to recommend him for further work.

'He got it wrong and unfortunately decisions like that decide football matches,' said Bruce, who also felt Cameron Jerome was denied a penalty.

Interestingly Bruce's players, ordered by their boss to clean up their act after four

red cards this season, hardly registered a protest for either decision.

Vine doubled his and Luton's tally just a minute later — and this time Birmingham only had themselves to blame. Emanuel's corner from the right was met by Leon Barnett's header and Vine was on hand to steer the ball home from close range. 'We were sloppy defending from set-pieces,' said Bruce.

The visitors drew level 21 minutes into the second half with a quality finish from Neil Danns. Campbell did well to gain

possession on the left and his cross found Danns, whose turn and shot in-off a post left keeper Marlon Beresford with no chance.

Luton settled it when Vine's cross was cushioned by Carlos Edwards and Bell had the freedom of Birmingham's area to slot home from 12 yards.

There was still more drama, with substitute Sebastian Larsson hitting a post for Birmingham and Kelly fluffing the rebound.

Taylor also saved well from Dean

Morgan as Luton greedily eyed a fourth. They did not need it.

'We always get goals at home so I was never overly worried,' said Newell. 'And when we do score it tends to go "Bang-bang". Having said that, the way they started I wasn't confident.'

LUTON (4-4-2): Beresford; Foley, Heikkinen, Barnett, Davis; Edwards, O'Leary (Bell 70min), Robinson, Emanuel (Morgan 55); Vine (Feeney 86), Parkin. **Subs** (not used): Keane, Brill. **Booked:** Heikkinen.

BIRMINGHAM (4-4-2): Maik Taylor; Kelly, Jaidi, N'Gotty, Sadler; Danns, Nafti (Larsson 82), Muamba (Kilkenny 55), McSheffrey; Campbell, Jerome (Forssell 68). **Subs** (not used): Doyle, Tebily. **Referee:** J Moss (West Yorkshire).



Picture: PETER FORD