

HOWARD ADDS INSULT TO INJURY

Luton0
Derby2

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LUTON old boy Steve Howard refused to celebrate as he netted his side's second goal in the Hatters' fifth straight Championship defeat.

Howard added to Jon Stead's second half opener to extend County's winning run to four matches, but he clearly knew his effort only served to compound the misery engulfing the club he left in the summer for £1million.

The defeat plunged Luton to within six points of the relegation zone and how manager Mike Newell must have wished for a striker with Howard's finishing skills on a day his own forwards misfired.

Howard was given a warm reception by the Kenilworth Road faithful but he immediately set about the job at hand.

From the kick-off he charged forward and sent a 25-yard shot screaming wide of Marlon Beresford's goal.

The pace was being set by County and they had clearly unnerved Luton as Stead put a shot narrowly wide from the edge of the box.

Stead proved a handful for the home defence and he carved another opening with a quarter-of-an-hour played but once again was off target, this time from 25-yards.

Stephen Bywater was by no means a bystander, however, as Russell Perrett's shot from 18-yards forced him into a superb diving save to tip the ball round the post.

Matt Oakley ensured the Rams bossed proceedings from midfield and he teed up Morten Bisgaard for a 12-yard shot that flew only a foot over the crossbar.

But the best chance of an end-to-end half fell to Luton, when Kevin Foley's cross was flicked on towards goal by Leon Barnett and Bywater was at full stretch again to tip it over.

Adam Boyd then forced Bywater to tip over his 25-yard thunderbolt.

Half time killed Town's momentum and the second half began with Derby back on top and Howard in search of an opener.

His 25-yard dipping shot was inches from putting County ahead but Luton went even closer minutes later when Boyd rattled a post after arrowing a fierce shot towards goal.

Giles Barnes and Howard kept Derby's assault on the Luton goal ticking over, sending shots just wide of Beresford's

goal, and it was only a matter of time before Town's resistance broke.

The goal came from Stead who buried the ball with aplomb from 18-yards when it fell to him in acres of space.

Newell's double substitution of Dean Morgan and Warren Feeney for Ahmet Brkovic and Rowan Vine, proved a vain attempt to rescue something from the game, as seconds later Derby's advantage was doubled.

Stead won a free kick just outside the area on the wing and Michael Johnson chipped a good ball into the box where Howard was on hand to smash in the second.

Howard's decision not to celebrate his goal may have come as a relief to Luton's fans but it provided them with no consolation for their side's failure to cope with Derby's attacks or to convert the many chances they had created.



STEVE HOWARD

Worst run in Newell's career

MIKE Newell admitted he was suffering his worst run in more than 20 years' football as the Hatters slumped to a sixth consecutive league and cup defeat.

He said: "It's five defeats on the bounce in the league and we'll have to get out of it.

"It's the worst run I've had as a manager or player. I've never lost five or six in a row before. In

20 years it's the worst.

"When we have all our players fit and available I know what we're capable of, but I'm not making any excuses.

"Maybe we've been punching above our weight a little bit here with the players we've been able to bring in."

Derby coach Julian Darby said: "It was a fantastic result but we're under no illusions.

"It's only the middle of November and there are plenty of games to play and plenty of points still to be won.

"It comes from hard work, determination, courage and bottle. We realise we're not quite where we want to be in terms of players, but the lads have shown terrific confidence and they're starting to see what we want here."