

SAINTS EDGE OUT HATTERS

Southampton2
Luton.....1

A WELL taken second half goal from Russell Perrett failed to inspire struggling Luton to an unlikely comeback as Southampton bagged a 2-1 win at St Mary's.

Luton's debutant goalkeeper Dean Kiely got his first taste of action as early as the second minute when Grzegorz Rasiak unleashed a drive from the edge of the area.

The former Republic of Ireland international was given the chance to show that his reactions have not been dulled by a spell on the Portsmouth bench but nervously parried the shot.

Rasiak continued to threaten and his weak header left Kiely with an easy save in the fifth minute.

Luton hit back in the 12th minute when striker Warren Feeney struck the post from six-yards in the aftermath of Carlos Edwards' attacking throw.

Southampton responded with the opening goal as defender Chris Baird rose to head home a teasing cross from Welsh full back Gareth Bale.

Baird was back to more familiar duties five minutes later when he cleared Lewis Emanuel's near post corner, while Bale continued to prove a menace on the left flank.

The 17-year-old kept asking questions of the Hatters defence with a succession of well-struck crosses — and Kiely looked uneasy, opting to punch one to safety, before fumbling another Rasiak shot.

His goal was breached for a second time 10 minutes from the interval when Leon Barnett was penalised for handball, leaving Rasiak with a penalty

which he converted with ease.

Mike Newell's side did not crumble — and within minutes of the restart, Dean Morgan twice had chances to haul them back into contention.

His lack of composure in front of goal meant that the hosts remained two goals clear — and with former Hearts forward Rudi Skacel starting to cause problems for the Luton back line, the result seemed in little doubt.

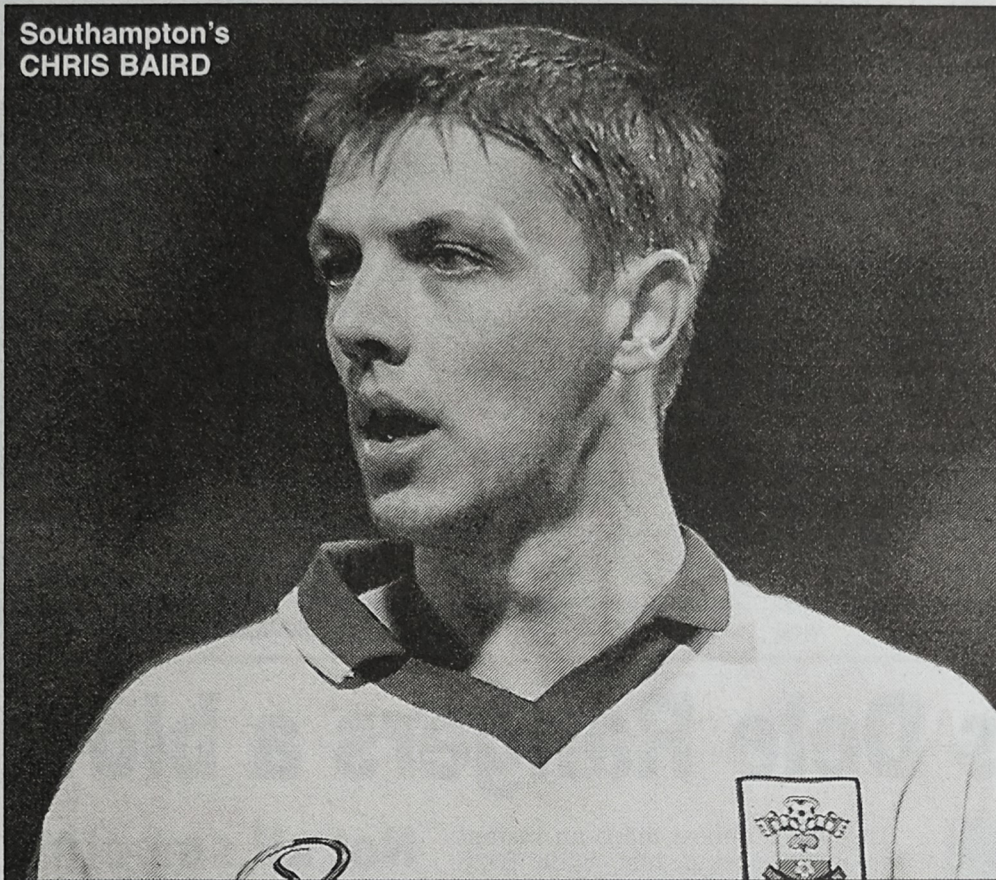
Perrett had other ideas and rose highest to convert Emanuel's free kick with a looping header.

George Burley was pressed into a rethink and opted to send on Kenwyne Jones in place of the ineffective Jhon Viafara.

Jones started brightly, breaking away for the Saints and finding space before failing to draw a save with his shot, while Kiely — looking more assured as the game wore on — did well to deny Skacel with an ambitious 30-yard effort.

Newell's side also had chances to claim a share of the spoils, and Ahmet Brkovic was handed a big opportunity to draw level but was off target with a header.

**Southampton's
CHRIS BAIRD**



Penalty decision splits opposing managers

MIKE Newell and George Burley disagreed over the awarding of a first half penalty to Southampton.

Luton boss Newell said: "The goal that decided the game was given for handball, but I know it wasn't handball by my defender.

"The ball struck the Southampton striker's hand and we have four or five players in our dressing room who will swear on their lives that the referee has made a mistake.

"That is another defeat and it is difficult to take too many positives out of the game, although the second half was much better than the first."

Saints manager Burley predictably took a different view of the incident which led to Southampton's spot-kick winner.

He said: "It was definitely a handball. Their player looked as if he was trying to play basketball."