

WOOD YOU

Crossbar and post deny Southend

06/07



■ Mark Gower — duels with Hatters defender Kevin Foley for possession *Picture: GALVINEYES*



■ Ball watching — Jamal Campbell-Ryce makes a break forward

THE BIG MATCH



CHAMPIONSHIP

Luton Town.....0

Southend United.....0

■ By CHRIS PHILLIPS

SOUTHEND United left Kenilworth Road on Friday night cursing the woodwork as they were twice denied by the frame of the goal during a tight 0-0 draw.

Striker Freddy Eastwood smacked a thunderous 30-yard shot against crossbar and, in the dying moments of the match, he raced clean through on goal — only to round the on-rushing Dean Kiely and fire his shot against the foot of the right post.

It was an exciting end to an encounter which started slowly as both sides struggled to get going in the opening exchanges.

With two minutes on the clock, David Bell sent a tame 20-yard shot straight at Blues' goalkeeper Darryl Flahavan, before Rowan Vine also fired a week effort at Flahavan after working his way past Efe Sodje.

Moments later, Carlos Edwards warmed the hands of the Shrimpers custodian with a stinging angled shot from 20 yards and, in the 22nd minute, the former Wrexham winger raced down the right flank and shot wide of the right post from the edge of the area.

The shot seemed to spark the Seasiders into action and for the remainder of the half they looked the more dangerous of the teams.

Mark Gower was the first to test Luton keeper Kiely as he fired in a low 25-yard drive and, after 31 minutes, Alan McCormack looped a left-footed half-volley onto the roof of the net after Gower's initial left wing cross had only been partially cleared.

Returning Shrimpers skipper Kevin Maher then fired well wide of the target from 20 yards having swapped passes with Lee Bradbury but the game was then held up in the 34th minute as assistant referee Steve Rubery was forced to limp off.

He was eventually replaced by fourth official Mike Russell and, just after the match restarted, Steve Hammell's low free-kick was easily smothered by Kiely.

The experienced shot-stopper then parried away a strong 20-yard shot from Eastwood but, on the stroke of half time, it was the home side's turn to almost open the scoring as Vine turned to send a curling snap shot only inches wide of the right post.

After the break, the Hatters began brightly and, in the 47th minute, their strong appeals for a penalty, when Dean Morgan's shot was blocked by the arm of a slipping Sodje, were waved away by referee Nigel Miller.

Morgan, formerly with Blues' Essex rivals Colchester United, then woefully shot wide of the left post from eight yards but, with play soon switching back to the other end of the field, it was the

BELIEVE IT?

all three points against the Hatters



■ Alan McCormack — leaves Luton's Carlos Edwards trailing in his wake

Shrimpers turn to get their supporters on the edge of their seats as Eastwood slammed a stunning 30-yard shot against the top of the crossbar with a sprawling Kiely well beaten.

A tame long range shot from Jamal Campbell-Ryce then rolled straight into the gloves of the relieved former Republic of Ireland international but, in the 71st minute, another Blues chance went begging when Alan

McCormack shot poorly wide of the right post from 18 yards.

The Shrimpers were now looking the more threatening side and, in an attempt to improve their attacking options, manager Steve Tilson made a double substitution 10 minutes from time as both Gary Hooper and Matt Harrold were thrown into the action.

Moments after those alterations though, the Hatters almost netted

as the powerful Leon Barnett — who was thrown up front for the last few minutes — saw his header from Kevin Foley's right wing cross superbly tipped over the crossbar by Flahavan.

But that was not to be the end of the drama as, two minutes into added on time, the Shrimpers hit back with Harrold sending his strike partner Eastwood clean through on goal.

The highly rated hot-shot

surged forward and rounded the grounded Kiely before striking the foot of the right post with the goal gaping.

Eastwood held his head in his hands at the missed opportunity but another was soon to come his way as he headed Hammell's right wing corner over the crossbar from six yards in the closing action of an even clash which could, and maybe should have, swung in Southend's favour.

Dogged determination offers hope

IT may not have been a contender for match of the season at a wet and windy Kenilworth Road on Friday, but it was a game which again demonstrated the Shrimpers' new-found determination to secure their Championship status.

Southend may not have played much pretty, free-flowing football but they dug deep to pick up a rare point on the road and came within a whisker of making it three late on.

A goal seemed certain when the normally reliable Freddy Eastwood broke the Hatters' offside trap to race clean



Blues analysis by CHRIS PHILLIPS

through in added on time, but his effort bounced back off the post.

Such thin margins separate success from failure at this level and, come May, they will also determine whether or not the Seaside will still be plying

their trade in the Championship next season.

The gap between Blues and safety has now been cut to seven points as just one of the six teams immediately above them in the table managed to pick up a win over the weekend.

Adding to that, a number of other sides are also beginning to be dragged into danger, with Crystal Palace winning just two of their last 14 matches and Luton one in 11.

Queens Park Rangers have also lost five successive games and if Southend can continue their current work-rate and

level of defending then it could still be possible for them to avoid relegation.

However, the forthcoming fixtures over the festive period will have a massive say on where the Shrimpers will finally finish this season.

If they can extend their recent mini revival to pick up more points during the glut of games then their lowly league placing could soon improve.

But there is little room for error now and a series of defeats could see them coming down along with the Christmas decorations.

STATS...

TEAM NEWS

STEVE Tilson made one change to his starting line-up as skipper Kevin Maher returned to the side after completing a three-match suspension. He was preferred to Lewis Hunt in the centre of the park, with the former Derby County man reverting to right back in place of Simon Francis, who dropped to the bench.

TEAMSHEET

● Southend United (4-4-2)

Flahavan 7 — not really tested between the sticks, but made a fine late save to stop Barnett scoring.

Hunt 7 — looked solid on his return to right back, keeping Brkovic quiet.

Sodje 6 — had a few uncharacteristic shaky moments up against his former club and could have conceded a penalty.

PRIOR 8 — mopped things up well at the heart of the defence, helping the Shrimpers secure a rare clean sheet.

Hammell 7 — was strong in defence and curled in some dangerous corners.

Campbell-Ryce 6 — full of running on the right flank but with little end product once again.

Maher 7 — used the ball well on his return to the side and made some strong tackles.

McCormack 7 — got stuck in alongside the skipper, but wasted some good shooting positions.

Gower 6 — drifted in and out of the game, but maintained possession well when on the ball.

Bradbury 6 — held the ball up well when required, but was not involved too often.

Eastwood 7 — was again Blues' most dangerous attacker and was twice denied by the woodwork.

Subs

Hooper 6 — came on for Campbell-Ryce 10 minutes from time and showed some neat touches.

Harrold 6 - replaced Bradbury at the same time and created Eastwood's late chance with a fine through ball.

Not used: Francis, Clarke and Welch.

● Luton Town

(4-4-2) Kiely 6, Foley 6, Heikkinen 6, Barnett 7, Emanuel 6, Edwards 6, Robinson 6, Bell 7, Brkovic 6, Morgan 6 (Feeney 65, 6), Vine 7 (Coynes 81, 6). Subs not used: Langley, Boyd and Beresford.

MATCH STATS

● Southend United

Shots on target: 4

Corners: 5

● Luton Town

Shots on target: 5

Corners: 4

● Referee

Nigel Miller (County Durham) 7/10

● Attendance

7,468

IN THE BOOK

● Southend United

Booked: None.

● Luton Town

Booked: None.

RESULTS

Friday: Luton 0 Southend 0. **Saturday:** Burnley 2 Sunderland 2, Colchester 3 Stoke 0, Derby 1 Crystal Palace 0, Hull 4 Cardiff 1, Ipswich 1 Leeds 0, Leicester 2 Barnsley 0, Preston 3 Plymouth 0, QPR 0 Wolves 1, Sheffield Wed 0 Birmingham 3, Southampton 2 Norwich 1, West Brom 5 Coventry.

TABLE

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pt
Birmingham	23	14	4	5	38	22	46
Derby	23	13	4	6	33	25	43
Preston	23	11	8	4	35	22	41
Southampton	23	11	6	6	37	27	39
Cardiff	23	11	6	6	34	26	39
Colchester	23	11	4	8	39	26	37
Stoke	23	10	7	6	30	18	37
West Brom	23	10	6	7	39	24	36
Burnley	23	10	6	7	32	25	36
Wolves	23	10	5	8	21	25	35
Sunderland	23	10	4	9	32	30	34
Plymouth	23	8	9	6	28	28	33
Sheffield Wed	23	9	6	8	30	31	33
Coventry	23	10	3	10	21	23	33
Ipswich	23	8	5	10	34	33	29
Norwich	23	8	5	10	30	37	29
Leicester	23	7	7	9	24	29	28
Crystal Palace	23	7	5	11	26	30	26
Luton	23	7	5	11	29	38	26
QPR	23	6	6	11	31	38	24
Barnsley	23	6	5	12	28	41	23
Hull City	23	5	5	13	22	35	20
Leeds	23	6	2	15	24	43	20
Southend	23	3	7	13	18	39	16

NEXT UP

● Carling Cup

Tottenham Hotspur (A) Wednesday, 8pm.