

It's misery!

COLCHESTER 4 LUTONTOWN 1

Andy MacKenzie reports from Layer Road

LATE Christmas gifts were in evidence at Layer Road as Luton fell to a Boxing Day hiding.

Town spurned a hatful of chances as goals from Kevin McLeod, Chris Iwelumo (2) and Richard Garcia inflicted a ninth away defeat of the season on Hatters.

Rowan Vine did at least manage to lift spirits slightly ahead of Friday's trip to leaders Birmingham with a consolation goal from the spot.

Returning skipper Chris Coyne came in for just his second league start of the season as Luton made one change to the side that beat Coventry 3-1 on Saturday.

Coyne's inclusion was at the expense of the injured Steve Robinson. Leon Barnett pushed up into midfield.

Meanwhile, Sol Davis was named on the bench as he made the 16 for the first time since suffering a stroke on the team coach on the way to Town's clash with Ipswich back in October.

Unbeaten at home since August, Colchester almost took the lead in the sixth minute. Garcia's instant pass down the right channel saw Iwelumo beat Luton's offside trap and race in on goal, but Coyne slid in with a last-ditch tackle.

Hatters soon settled and enjoyed their share of possession before Dean Morgan tested Dean Gerken with a 30-yard shot. Two minutes later Kevin Foley intercepted Wayne Brown's pass out of defence and played in Carlos Edwards, who ran to the edge of the penalty area, only to drag his right-foot shot past the far post.

Colchester got back on top with some slick football and shortly after Iwelumo almost burst through for a second time the hosts took the lead in the 23rd minute.

Luton were slow to close down a short corner routine between Kevin Watson and Kem Izzet, allowing the latter to curl in a cross from the right corner of the penalty area that was glanced home by McLeod.

Town responded well and after Morgan hit another long range effort at Gerken, the home custodian then had to twice deny Luton with his legs. Ahmet Brkovic ran in on goal from Morgan's clever 27th minute pass, only for Gerken to block at the left-hand corner of his six-yard box, and then Brkovic's flick released Vine three minutes later, but his left-foot shot from 16 yards bounced away off Gerken.

Gerken almost undid his good work 60 seconds later as he completely mis-kicked a goal-kick, allowing Vine a clear run in



Referee: Phil Crossley (Kent)

Attendance: 5,427

on goal, but as the striker prepared to pull the trigger he was thwarted by a well-timed challenge from Pat Baldwin.

Luton came again in the 36th minute as Morgan fed Barnett in midfield to strike a 28-yard effort that was pushed around the post by the busy Gerken.

But Hatters almost went 2-0 down in the 39th minute as Jamie Cureton controlled a half-clearance on his knee and hit an instant right-foot volley from 20-yards that Dean Kiely tipped against the bar.

There was nothing Kiely could do two minutes later, though, as Cureton spread the play to the right for Garcia, whose perfect low curling cross was swept home by Iwelumo from six yards.

Colchester almost got a third seconds after the interval when Watson drilled in a 16-yard effort that clipped the outside of the post. A minute before the hour mark Luton did fall further behind as Coyne fouled Iwelumo and Garcia touched home Watson's low free-kick from close range.

Town's afternoon was summed up as Foley burst in on goal two minutes later and squared for Brkovic, who fired over from 12 yards in front of an open goal.

The U's made it four with a superbly worked goal in the 65th minute as a passing move that covered the entire pitch ended with Iwelumo powerfully heading home Cureton's right-wing cross.

Luton were handed a consolation late on as Vine bagged his 12th of the season from the spot against his former club.



Picture: GARETH OWEN

BOXING DAY ACTION: Luton's Rowan Vine battles it out with Garcia at Layer Road