

Dannns the man with City saver

06/07

Picture: ACTION IMAGES/CARL RECINE

BIRMINGHAM	2
LUTON	2

By **Peter Edwards**

SUPERSUB Neil Danns rescued a point for Birmingham in injury-time to avert a shock defeat as Steve Bruce was forced to settle for a nine-point lead at the top of the table.

Luton finally looked on course to end their travel sickness when Warren Feeney struck 13 minutes from time for his first league goal of the year.

It would have been the Hatters' first away win in eight attempts, but Danns smashed in from close range from Radhi Jaidi's flick-on.

Bruce will be given millions to spend by Birmingham's board next month but the best money is set to be the £120,000 towards a new St Andrews surface as his side's hopes of victory were wrecked by the mud.

Birmingham lumbered on a simply awful pudding of a pitch after they lost their way following Gary McSheffrey's opener.

Luton then took charge through goals from Rowan Vine and Feeney.

Despite Danns' leveller, the hosts' hopes of their 12th win in 14 games – which would have equalled a record from 1920-21 – disappeared in the drizzle.

Recent Championship history is on Birmingham's side, with three of the last five teams to be top of this division at Christmas securing automatic promotion.

Luton's dreadful away record had threatened to suck them



MAKING HIS MARK: Gary McSheffrey puts Birmingham ahead against Luton at St Andrews last night

into a relegation scrap but they should have been given a fourth-minute penalty.

Jaidi was all over Richard Langley before the midfielder stumbled in the box but referee Phil Joslin was unmoved.

If there was any complacency from the hosts it should have vanished when Vine, Luton's top scorer, might have scored another but headed Lewis Emanuel's cross against the woodwork with Taylor stranded.

But there was no fluency from the leaders and Nicklas Bendtner, who has finally had his loan arrangement extended until the end of the season by Arsene Wenger, almost looked

as if he was perturbed by the Arsenal manager's decision.

The opener, just after the half-hour, was a mess. Cameron Jerome miscued towards McSheffrey and he poked the ball past Dean Kiely after a deflection off Carlos Edwards.

McSheffrey's 15th goal of the season underlines exactly why Bruce fought so hard to persuade Coventry to part with him.

The visitors were rewarded for their endeavour shortly before half-time when Leon Barnett's attempted shot found Vine and he beat Taylor with ease.

There were concerns early in the second half for the Hatters when Markus Heikkinen was

taken off a stretcher after a 50-50 challenge with Fabrice Muamba.

Luton fired a warning through Feeney's drive and Bruce was forced into replacing Jerome for DJ Campbell. The visitors took the lead when Feeney capitalised on an error by Jaidi to drive past Taylor, but Birmingham hit back in the final moments.

BIRMINGHAM: Maik Taylor; Kelly, Sadler, Upson, Jaidi; Nafti (Danns 76), Larsson (Kilkenny 84), Muamba; McSheffrey, Jerome (Campbell 76), Bendtner. **Booked:** Jaidi, Nafti. **Goals:** McSheffrey 31, Danns 90.

LUTON: Kiely; Foley, Emanuel (Davis 52), Coyne; Heikkinen (Holmes 57); Barnett; Edwards, Barnett, Langley, Morgan; Feeney, Vine. **Booked:** Holmes, Vine. **Goals:** Vine 44, Feeney 77.

Referee: P Joslin (Nottingham).