

DANNS COMES TO LEADERS' RESCUE

Birmingham2
Luton.....2

06/07
NEIL Danns scored an injury-time equaliser to earn leaders Birmingham a point they barely deserved against Mike Newell's side.

Substitute Danns hooked the ball into the net from close-range after Radhi Jaidi had headed on a cross from Neil Kilkenny.

Luton were sharper in all departments with their wide players Carlos Edwards and Dean Morgan a constant threat, while Rowan Vine looked particularly sharp up front.

For the Blues it was a wake-up call if they thought they could stroll through the second half of the campaign and only midfielder Fabrice Muamba emerged with much credit.

The home players wore black armbands as a mark of respect for former City midfielder Johnny Vincent, who died during Christmas at the age of 59.

Luton had strong claims for a penalty after five minutes when Jaidi appeared to bring down Richard Langley but referee Phil Joslin waved play on.

Hatters defender Lewis Emanuel ventured forward to try his luck from 30-yards and his low drive was saved by Maik Taylor away to his left.

The woodwork came to City's rescue after 14 minutes when a cross from Emanuel picked out Warren Feeney whose header beat Taylor but cannoned back off the post.

Jaidi became the first player to be yellow carded three minutes later for bringing down Vine.

Taylor had to come racing out of his box to clear from Feeney as Luton continued to look the better side.



Birmingham City's NEIL DANNS (left) celebrates his last minute equaliser with GARY MCSHEFFREY

But after 32 minutes Birmingham went ahead against the run of play via Gary McSheffrey's 14th goal since his move from Coventry in August.

Stephen Kelly's pass was backheeled across the Luton box by Nicklas Bendtner and fell to Cameron Jerome.

His attempted shot found its way to McSheffrey at the far post and, although Edwards blocked his first shot, he was on hand to make no mistake with his second attempt.

Luton deservedly got back on level terms a minute before the interval.

City failed to clear Langley's inswinging free kick and the ball eventually ricocheted to Vine who made no mistake with a rising shot past Taylor from close-range.

There was little goalmouth action in the early stages of the second half but Luton were forced into a substitution

after Markus Heikkinen was stretchered off after a challenge by Muamba.

His replacement Peter Holmes was instantly booked for chopping down Mehdi Nafti and Feeney was also yellow carded for a reckless challenge on Mat Sadler.

Taylor clung on to a low drive from Feeney who then stunned the home side by putting Luton ahead with 13 minutes remaining via his first league goal in 2006.

Substitute Sol Davis, in only his second appearance since recovering from a stroke, played the pass to Feeney who checked inside before drilling a low shot past Taylor.

Kiely clung onto a late effort from Danns but the substitute salvaged a share of the spoils with seconds remaining.

Bruce relieved to 'steal' a point

BIRMINGHAM manager Steve Bruce admitted his side "got away with it" in their clash with Luton.

He said: "Luton played extremely well — but the state of the pitch, the wind and the rain made it very difficult.

"It was a huge leveller in terms of the conditions, and individually our players had an off night. But the lads showed great resilience and kept going to the end.

"We stuck at it and in the end got something out of the game. Maybe we were a bit 'leggy'. It is always a difficult time with the games coming thick and fast."

Luton player Markus Heikkinen suffered a broken leg in a challenge with Birmingham midfielder Fabrice Muamba which will keep him out of action for the remainder of the campaign.

Hatters boss Mike Newell was unhappy with the challenge, but Bruce insisted there was nothing malicious about the tackle from the on loan Arsenal player.

Newell said: "From Heikkinen's point of view, I thought it was an honest tackle. From the Birmingham player's point of view, I can't say the same thing."