



By GLYNN WATSON

LUTON TOWN'S outspoken boss Mike Newell is concerned that he will be without the services of Markus Heikkinen for the rest of the season after the Finnish defender broke his leg in Friday night's draw at Birmingham.

The Hatters dominated the match and looked set to secure three points against the runaway Championship leaders, only for Neil Danns to grab a last-gasp equaliser for Steve Bruce's misfiring side.

Newell was disappointed to only take a point from the match, but was more concerned for Heikkinen's welfare.

He said: "Losing Heikkinen is a big blow to us. We missed him and now he'll be out for the rest of the season."

"I felt we deserved to win. The character of the side has never been in question but the results haven't gone for us."

The Championship leaders displayed great resilience as Luton appeared to be heading for their first away win in eight games following goals from their two strikers, Rowan Vine and Warren Feeney.

Birmingham, beaten 3-2 at Luton in October, were below form on the night but never gave up to earn a rather lucky point.

Luton hardly operated like a team which had been beaten in their previous seven away games. Unlike many visiting teams to St Andrew's this season they were not content just to defend.

MATCH STATS

BIRMINGHAM v LUTON

4	Shots on target	6
2	Shots off target	4
6	Corners	1
0	Offside	3
15	Fouls conceded	12
2	Yellow Cards	2
0	Red Cards	0
49	Possession %	51

Aft: 24,642 Rating: ★★★★★
Ref: P Joslin - 6/10

This refreshing approach was an eye-opener for Birmingham who were put off their stride to such an extent that they found themselves on the back-foot in the early stages.

It was in this spell that the danger of Vine and Feeney was troublesome to an anxious Birmingham defence that was far from secure.

In another innocent looking attack, Luton were unlucky not to go ahead. A hopeful cross from the left was headed goalwards by Vine and Maik Taylor could only stand and watch the ball hit the post and bounce to Feeney who headed weakly into the grateful arms of the Birmingham goalkeeper.

Birmingham, in very sharp contrast, were untidy in most aspects of their performance and hardly played like Championship leaders.

There was a definite lack of drive in midfield in the combined absence of Damien Johnson and Stephen Clemence who have been the backbone of Birmingham's dramatic revival over the last couple of months.

Typically, Birmingham turned the game in their favour with a swiftly executed move in the 31st minute which gave Gary McSheffrey his 14th goal of the season.

In pouring rain, Seb Larsson played the ball to the over-lapping Stephen Kelly who quickly found Nicklas Bendtner. The young Dane played a back-heeler to Cameron Jerome who crossed to the far post where McSheffrey's first effort bounced back off Kevin Foley to score at the second attempt.

But Birmingham's defence was badly at

fault in the 43rd minute when they failed to clear Richard Langley's poor free-kick. The ball was knocked to the unmarked Vine to slot home the equaliser with a low, angled shot.

Luton's performance was a revelation but they suffered as setback when they lost Heikkinen with a broken right leg.

Birmingham, however, struggled to get on top in the heavy, swirling rain as Luton, encouraged by their small band of travelling fans, strived to snatch a surprise win.

Their second goal came in the 77th minute following a smartly executed move.

A defence-splitting pass from Sol Davis found Feeney and the Northern Ireland international smashed a low shot home.

But Birmingham snatched a point out of the fire with a last desperate attack which resulted in Danns, who had missed from close range a couple of minutes earlier, slotting home the equaliser following a long cross from Mathew Sadler.

INJURY WOE FOR LUTON

HIGH JUMP: Birmingham's Nicklas Bendtner rises above Luton's Steve Robinson and Dean Morgan

PICTURES: Action Images



JUST IN TIME: Neil Danns scores Birmingham's late equaliser

MAIK TAYLOR 6/10

Had an indifferent game and found himself under a lot more pressure than usual

MATHEW SADLER 5/10

Another below-par performance, he often appeared to be out of position

STEPHEN KELLY 5/10

Was often left stranded by Luton's swiftly inter-changing attack

MATTHEW UPSON 5/10

The acting captain did not enjoy his usual commanding performance

RADHI JAIDI 5/10

A shaky game, he had trouble dealing with the pace of Vine and Feeney

FABRICE MUAMBA 5/10

Too often caught in possession and played second fiddle in midfield

SEBASTIAN LARSSON 5/10

Rarely made an impression, he was often by-passed by Luton's swift attacks

BIRMINGHAM

MEDHI NAFTI 6/10

Played his heart out but could not provide the service for the frontmen

NICKLAS BENDTNER 6/10

A clever flick set up Birmingham's opening goal but he was not as sharp as usual

CAMERON JEROME 6/10

Ran around enthusiastically but rarely looked like scoring

GARY MCSHEFFREY 7/10

The opportunist transformed the game with a goal from close range

SUBSTITUTES

DANNIS; FOR NAFTI (76)
CAMPBELL; FOR JEROME (76)
KILKENNY; FOR LARSSON (84)
NOT USED: DOYLE; TAYLOR;

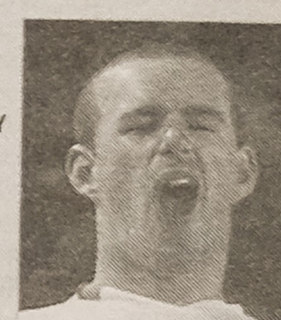
STAR PLAYERS



GARY MCSHEFFREY

STAR RATING

7



ROWAN VINE

STAR RATING

8

DEAN KIELY 6/10

Had a quiet game but dealt with most situations with confidence

CHRIS COYNE 7/10

Played a real captain's role with a top-flight performance

LEON BARNETT 6/10

Enjoyed a commanding performance and is definitely a player for the future

KEVIN FOLEY 6/10

The young Irishman distinguished himself with another commendable performance

MARKUS HEIKKINEN 6/10

Played a smart covering role before he was stretched off with a broken leg

LEWIS EMANUEL 6/10

Possesses a good left foot as he demonstrated with one powerful long-range effort

DEAN MORGAN 6/10

Played some neat passes as he attempted to provide a service for Vine and Feeney

LUTON TOWN

RICHARD LANGLEY 7/10

An early danger and almost won a penalty after being brought down by Jaidi

CARLOS EDWARDS 5/10

Admirably played his part in Luton's fighting performance

WARREN FEENEY 7/10

Enjoyed a good game and his pace was always troublesome for Jaidi

ROWAN VINE 8/10

The young striker was always a handful to the home defence

SUBSTITUTES

DAVIS - 6/10; FOR EMANUEL (52)
HOLMES - 6/10; FOR HEIKKINEN (57)
NOT USED: BERESFORD; O'LEARY; BOYD;