

Sol's big day soured by Bell's sending off



HATTERS 0 CARDIFF 0

FEARLESS full-back Sol Davis completed the next stage of his remarkable recovery from a stroke by skipping Luton on his first start since his illness.

But Davis' big day was soured by the sending off of Town's star man David Bell in the 72nd minute as Hatters held out for a point against Cardiff.

Luton went into the New Year's Day fixture looking to start 2007 with a bang and move themselves away from the Championship relegation zone.

However, after a disjointed first-half was followed by an improved opening in the second period, Town were left hanging on after Bell received a second booking and was ordered off.

The eventual draw handed Hatters a rare point haul from their four festive fixtures and also saw Davis safely complete 90 minutes, showing no ill-effects from his stroke.

Boss Mike Newell said of his determined 27-year-old defender: "It was a big day in terms of him starting, but he's been back with us for a while now and has already made two substitute appearances.

"He's not the type of lad to let anything faze him and it was good to see him last the 90 minutes.

"He's gradually building up his fitness and having played 20 minutes and half an hour here and there before hand would have helped him.

"He's a fit lad anyway and got through the full game, but we'll have to keep an eye on him and see how he is afterwards because sometimes adrenaline can carry you through when you're coming back from injury and disguise your real fitness."

Davis donned the captain's armband for only the second time during his time at Kenilworth Road - the previous occasion being a 2-1 LDV Vans Trophy win at Rushden & Diamonds on November 4, 2003, when the former Windon man was incidentally sent off

F.G.O



Picture: GARETH OWEN

for a second bookable offence a minute before half-time.

His two skipper occasions led to the player afterwards light-heartedly claiming to be the only current captain with an unbeaten record at the club!

But despite the draw, results elsewhere sucked Town closer to the relegation trapdoor as Southend, Leeds, Hull and QPR below Hatters in the table all collected victories.

Striker Warren Feeney said: "It was a bit frustrating in the first-half. We couldn't seem to get much together and we're not getting at teams here like we were earlier in the season.

"We seemed to pick it up a bit in the second-half before Belly got sent off, but it was disappointing overall especially after the way we had performed against Birmingham on the Friday.

"Also it wasn't good with a lot of the teams below us picking up points, but we don't want to start looking over our shoulders. We've got enough to get ourselves out of it, but we need to start proving it and producing it on the field."

Town weren't helped by having to change their entire back four from the side that drew at Birmingham as Kevin Foley, Chris Coyne, Markus Heikkinen and Lewis Emanuel were all missing.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC: Sol Davis, who donned the skipper's armband on his first senior start since suffering a stroke, turns away from Cardiff's Riccardo Scimeca during the New Year's Day 0-0 draw. Town were left to hang on for the point after David Bell saw red late on for a second yellow card

THE MINUTES THAT MATTERED



Cardiff dominate the opening exchanges and work Dean Kiely twice in the space of a minute through Stephen McPhail's 20-yarder and Michael Chopra's 15 yard shot.



As the visitors create more chances, Luton's plight is shown by team-mates Richard Langley and Dean Morgan having to be pulled apart after an angry confrontation.



Luton improve after the interval and almost break the deadlock when Neil Alexander saves Leon Barnett's six yard header and blocks Rowan Vine's follow up.



David Bell's second yellow card leaves Town with 10 men and they survive a nervy finale that sees Chopra fire just wide before Kiely saves from Willo Flood.

MIKE NEWELL'S VIEW

"I DIDN'T think we started the game well at all.

"I thought we were very poor for the first 20 minutes and it was difficult to get anything going.

"We did have chances to win the game, but they had a couple as well.

"We had three in a minute that were really good chances and if you don't take them you're not going to win games.

"We even had the advantage of an extra day's rest. They (Cardiff) played on the Saturday and then had to travel to away.

"If anyone had the advantage it was us. But they only made one change whereas we made four and it's always difficult when you have to change three of your back four.

"But at the end of the day it is a point and we'll take that as we had to play for the last 20 minutes with ten men. For the sending off, Belly slipped as he went in to make the challenge and he caught the lad.

"But with the way the rules are now you can end up getting sent off for absolutely nothing. The first booking was for a block tackle and if there was any follow through it came from Stephen McPhail.

"He (Bell) was probably the best player on the pitch when he was on, certainly our best player."



Left: 17958

That meant Carlos Edwards being forced to fill-in at right back and he said: "We've got players dropping like flies at the moment. We have been a bit unlucky with our chances, but we really need a victory to lift us.

"The next game may be in the cup, but I think a win is still vital for us."

STAR HATTER

DAVID BELL:

The 22-year-old saw his afternoon spoils as he was sent off for a second yellow card in the 72nd minute. But when on the pitch he dictated from midfield.



F.G.O