

GR-EIGHT!

BRISTOL ROVERS 1
LUTON TOWN 1

REDUCED to eight players for the first time in their history heroic Hatters staged an incredible rearguard action to somehow snatch a point against all the odds at the Memorial Ground on Boxing Day, *writes Mark Wood.*

The Hatters had to endure a relentless Rovers barrage but stood tall in what will count as one of the club's greatest ever defensive performances.

Proud Luton boss Kevin Blackwell said: "You've got to say the midfield of (Matthew Spring) and (David Edwards) ran themselves into the ground. From one to eight they were magnificent. It would be wrong to single one person out.

"It had heart, passion, commitment and everything you would want in a game. You weren't sure if another one was going to get sent off or another goal was going to be scored.

"It was fantastic for everybody who came here today. It will live long in the memory."

Bristol started the much brighter of the two sides and

Brave Hatters defy the odds to claim a point after three players see red to set new club record

won a penalty on 13 minutes after a misunderstanding between Jaroslaw Fojut and Chris Perry allowed Andy Williams to race clear.

He rounded Dean Brill before referee Andy Hall adjudged Chris Coyne to have tripped him and awarded the spot kick and showed Hatters' captain the red card. The visitors protested, but in vain, and Williams lifted himself off the floor to drill the spot kick home.

Despite being a man down both Spring and Edwards registered efforts on target, while Calvin Andrew would have had a simple tap in from Alan Goodall's teasing 31st minute cross had he not checked his run.

Brill saved sharply from the impressive Williams three minutes later, before producing a brilliant double save to claw away a Williams header with one hand and then somehow

deny Danny Coles from the rebound.

Hatters were struggling to live with Bristol on the break and things went from bad to worse on 40 minutes. Having just been booked for a late challenge Steve Robinson was then penalised for pulling back a Pirates player on the edge of the box and was shown a second yellow card.

Luton were denied an equaliser early in the second half when Spring's cross appeared to rebound off a Rovers arm, but they did level on 49 minutes. Bell's curling free-kick caused havoc in the defence and Edwards claimed the decisive touch.

Bell's long range shot warmed Steve Phillips' gloves moments later, but Bristol were always dangerous and only a great last ditch tackle from sub Keith Keane denied Aaron Lescott.

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Under a Bristol barrage Luton had to defend for their lives and only just escaped on 73 minutes when, having struggled to clear the ball, Steve Elliott's lobbed effort was headed on to the underside of the bar by Edwards and the ball bounced away to safety.

Spring then flashed a shot inches wide with 15 minutes left, which left Blackwell to muse: "We thought it was in. That would have been a fairy-tale to go on and win."

With 13 minutes left Grant was shown a straight red card for a two-footed lunge on Williams and Rovers began to turn the screw.

Brill somehow denied Williams with eight minutes left, flinging out his right boot to turn a venomous effort on to the far post.

Disley should have won the game for Rovers in injury time, but fired his point blank header inches wide, while Fojut was on hand to head Stuart Campbell's lobbed effort off the line at the death.

At the final whistle even the Bristol Rovers fans applauded Luton from the field.

STAR HATTER: Dean Brill, for a series of superb stops.