

Cherries choker

Town throw it all away after brave comeback

by Carl Field at Dean Court

TWO goals in injury time broke Hatters' hearts as Bournemouth stole victory from the jaws of defeat last night.

After looking dead and buried at one stage, lion-hearted Hatters recovered from two goals down to lead 3-2.

But they capitulated at the death as the home side snatched victory in injury time.

New Hatters boss Mick Harford received both good and bad news on the injury front before kick-off.

Matthew Spring had recovered from a minor niggle in time to play, although star winger David Bell did not make it and was replaced by Dean Morgan, making his first start for Luton since September.

The only other change from the weekend saw top scorer Paul Furlong replace young Calvin Andrew up front.

Hatters' league record of one win on the road all season is far from impressive and they made the worst possible start, finding themselves behind within 60 seconds.

Sam Vokes was given room to flash over a cross from the right towards the back post that caught the Luton defence asleep, and the unmarked Max Gradel had the simple task of lashing the ball past a helpless Dean Brill from close range.

The Cherries were showing no ill effects from their 4-1 battering at the hands of Southend United on Saturday and it almost got even worse for Luton soon after the early strike.

Chris Perry had to be alert to head another dangerous cross out for a corner on four minutes, while moments later midfielder Danny Hollands fired over from distance.

Hatters' first real effort of note came on the 20 minute mark and, although Spring got his 30 yard free-kick up and over the wall, it went just



HOPE: Matthew Spring strokes home a first half penalty for the Hatters to put them back into the game

Bournemouth 4 Luton Town 3

too high to test rookie goalkeeper Ryan Pryce.

Things got even worse for Luton just after the half hour mark, and once again it was Vokes who was instrumental in the build up.

The Bournemouth front man received the ball on halfway and played an inch-perfect through ball into the path of Jo Kuffour, who raced clear of Town's patched up defence and made no mistake with a clinical finish from the edge of the box.

Luton almost grabbed themselves a lifeline within moments of falling

two behind when Drew Talbot's poked shot from six yards was well blocked by Pryce.

The lively Luton striker could not be faulted for his tireless work rate but was having to live off scraps in the Bournemouth box.

However, Luton's luck changed on the stroke of half time when referee Steven Cook adjudged that Furlong had been brought down by ex-Hatters defender Russell Perrett and pointed to the spot.

Having already been booked, Perrett was perhaps fortunate to stay on the field, but Spring made no mistake with the spot kick to make Harford's half time team talk that little bit easier.

Spring had a decent opportunity to draw Hatters level on 49 minutes

but fired straight at Pryce after Morgan's initial shot was charged down.

The ball was only half cleared and, as it was played back in, Morgan probably should have scored from close range, but his weak effort bobbed harmlessly wide.

On 56 minutes, Bournemouth threatened again down the left as Kuffour's dangerous looking cross was headed just over by Hollands.

A minute later, Warren Cummings' inswinging corner from the left was met by Gradel, but his header from point blank range went over.

One thing that Luton cannot be

>> Star Hatter: Matthew Spring. Energetic performance and kept his cool from the spot to give Luton hope

BOURNEMOUTH



Unused subs: Pearce, Bartley, Tessem, Partington

LUTON TOWN



Unused subs: Jackson, Emanuel, Beresford

Referee: Steven Cook (Surey)

faulted for in recent months is their incredible team spirit and that shone through once again on the hour mark as they hit back to haul themselves level through Morgan.

A great cross from Darren Currie picked out Morgan and he fired low into the net to atone for his earlier miss.

A difficult period followed for the Hatters as the Cherries piled the pressure on, and Brill had to be at his best to deny Kuffour on 63 minutes.

But not for the first time this season, Luton managed to hold their own under heavy pressure.

And on 78 minutes veteran striker Furlong completed Luton's remarkable comeback.

Talbot did brilliantly to dispossess dithering right-back Neil Young before floating a cross into the danger zone.

Spring's bullet header was well stopped by youngster Pryce, but he spilled the ball in the six yard box and Furlong was on hand to lash it high into the top corner.

Sadly Luton's joy was short-lived. First Furlong levelled in the dying moments before substitute Brett Pitman popped up to steal victory for the Cherries in injury time.

Picture by Gareth Owen