

Hunted down

Reading 5 Luton Town 1

by Carl Field

LUTON Town bowed out of the Carling Cup at the second round stage as they were thumped 5-1 by Championship opponents Reading at the Madejski Stadium last night.

Despite a typically hard working and tireless performance, the Hatters were second best all the way through the encounter and were taken apart by the higher division outfit.

And all the Hatters had to show for their hard work was a late consolation from substitute Ryan Charles.

On-loan Leicester goalkeeper Conrad Logan was given his debut, in what was one of four changes from the weekend. Ex-Royals midfielder Kevin Watson, defender Keith Keane and exciting young winger Tristan Plummer were also handed their first starts of the campaign.

Having already disposed of Championship side Plymouth in the last round, the Hatters certainly had nothing to fear, but were on the back foot right from the first whistle.

Reading had a glorious chance to open the scoring in just the fifth minute. James Henry split the Luton defence in half with a delightful through ball into the feet of Shane Long, who had shaken off his marker and beaten the off-side trap. But, after skipping around a last-ditch challenge, the Irish forward fired his shot over the crossbar.

Despite the fact it was a makeshift side, Steve Coppell's Reading were playing some delightful football early on, and it was their first corner of the evening that led to the opening goal on 11 minutes.

Stephen Hunt's inswinging corner from the right was met by Noel Hunt, who headed the ball beyond Logan and into the net.

Three minutes later, Reading were on the hunt again as they doubled their lead. This time it was goalscorer Noel Hunt, who slid a perfect ball into the box from the right, where Stephen Hunt was waiting unmarked inside the six-yard box to



Picture by Gareth Owen

LONG NIGHT: Ryan Charles' late strike was a mere consolation for the Hatters at the Madejski Stadium

prod the easy chance home beyond a defenceless Logan.

Shortly after going two behind, Luton then came mighty close to getting themselves back into the contest when Royals' keeper Adam Federici had to palm striker Sam Parkin's speculative effort towards goal behind for a corner.

As the half wore on, Long twice

went close to adding to his side's tally. First, he was agonisingly close to getting on the end of Henry's free kick from the left, before then seeing his low close range shot in stoppage time thwarted by Logan's instinctive block.

At the other end, Chris Martin's powerful pile-driver in first half stoppage time forced a decent save out of Federici in the Reading goal.

Manager Mick Harford threw on Rossi Jarvis in place of the below-par Sol Davis at half time, but the

STAR HATTER Kevin Nicholls. Wears his heart on his sleeve.

READING



Unused subs: Kebe, Conway, Rosenior, Andersen

LUTON TOWN



Unused subs: Brill, Roper, Asifu-Adajaye, Spillane

Referee: Dean Whitestone (Northamptonshire)

Attendance: 7,498

change proved to be no avail as two more Reading goals in the space of just 60 seconds, early in the second half, finished the contest.

On 55 minutes, Henry provided the corner from the left that resulted in centre-half Alex Pearce heading in to make it 3-0.

The home crowd had barely had time to regain their breath as, from the re-start, Reading went straight back out on the counter-attack and it was left to Noel Hunt to slide the ball from the right into the path of Jem Karacan.

With the Hatters' defence all at sea, he was left with the easy task of finishing from close range.

Henry made it 5-0 shortly afterwards and, despite being on the wrong end of a thrashing, Luton's players still refused to lay down and die and fought for the cause right to the death.

And they grabbed the consolation goal that their hard work deserved on 81 minutes when substitute Charles hooked the ball over the line from just inside the six-yard box.

This was much to the delight of the travelling hoards of Luton fans behind the goal, who were still in full voice despite the disappointing scoreline.