Jaded Hatters offer little threat

MIDWEEK CUP WIN TAKES ITS TOLL AS LUTON FALL FOUL OF CONTROVERSIAL REFEREEING DECISIONS

LUTON TOWN FC

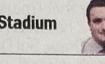
FOOTBALL LEAGUE TWO ROCHDALE Thorpe 2, Le Fondre (pen) 59

LUTON TOWN

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08/09

TOM LEECH at the Spotland Stadium



HATTERS were caught cold by a quick goal and some bizarre refereeing decisions in Arctic conditions yesterday.

Referee Steve Bratt lists live music as one of his hobbies on the referees' website and from his over-excitable use of his whistle I'd suggest he has a penchant for German techno.

All that was missing from the whis-tle-happy ref was a glow stick in a poor performance from the West Midlands official who confused both sets of fans with some strange decisions and his insistence on stopping the game every couple of minutes.
That's not to let Luton off the hook

however. Mick Harford's men were well off the pace and looked drained from their midweek cup win when Rochdale took the lead seconds in through a quick free kick and Lee Thorpe's finish.

Adam Le Fondre's debatable second half penalty made sure of the points for Dale but in truth Hatters never looked like making a further dent in their points deduction.

Luton were hampered by injuries before kick-off and a glaring omission from the team that progressed to the FA Cup second round was that of Kevin Nicholls. The experienced captain would surely not have let his side concede as they did just 94 seconds into the game.

Stand-in skipper Keith Keane was unfairly penalised for a challenge on Will Buckley and went to complain to the ref while Dale got on with taking the free kick. Scott Wiseman ran down the right unchallenged and crossed for Thorpe to score with a diving header.

It could have been worse ten minutes later when Thorpe spurned a chance for his and Dale's second. Gary Jones' ball through two Luton players put the striker clear. Vigilant Rossi Jarvis tracked back enough to put the striker off his shot and he blazed over.

Surprisingly there were no changes at the restart after a half where everyone bar Conrad Logan had looked pretty substandard.

Dale were dealt a blow on 50 minutes when their captain and midfield enforcer Jones came off second best in a challenge with Michael Spillane and had to hobble to the Spotland treatment room.

A debate raged during the break about Ian Roper's ongoing battle with Dale's strikeforce.

The home press pack proclaimed their shock that the big centre half hadn't been booked for climbing on top of Thorpe and Le Fondre on every high ball whereas the Luton hacks insisted Roper was just standing his ground in the face of some clear backing in.

On 58 minutes the referee made



HOT TO HANDLE: Ian Roper does battle with Rochdale's Lee Thorpe, scorer of the opening goal in the 2-0 defeat

took when he penalised Roper for a 'push' on Rory McArdle.

Kennedy drilled a corner into the box and as the pair both fell down some half-hearted calls for a penalty came from one or two Dale players more in hope than expectation.

But Mr Bratt had clearly seen something and gave the spot kick to the delight of the home crowd.

Logan couldn't repeat his penalty saving heroics of midweek and guessed the wrong way from Le Fondre's 12-yard blast.

Luton's instant reply was to haul off the ineffective Garreth O'Connor for Drew Talbot. The striker, ahead of schedule in his return from a long injury, replaced O'Connor on the left flank as Hatters began to string two passes together.

But the dedicated travelling support had to wait until 12 minutes from time to see anything close to resembling a fightback.

Some patient build-up play had an end product when McVeigh burst into the area before floating the ball to the far post. Talbot rose perfectly, heading downwards but keeper Sam Russell - who had been

clear whose side of the argument he a virtual bystander all game - pro- front with Kevin Gallen moved to duced when his team needed him midfield. blocking the goalbound effort.

Harford threw on burly defender Harry Worley soon after and asked the Leicester defender to play up

His presence could have been better deployed in his natural position however as Rochdale pressed for a

Post match...

MICHAEL SPILLANE'S bloodied nose was the physical proof of how badly referee Steve Bratt got it wrong at Spotland.

The on-loan Norwich defender had a double whammy of a whack in the face and a yellow card as Bratt's performance overshadowed promotion-chasing Rochdale's win.

Spillane explained: "The ref didn't know what he was doing. Their player (Nathan Stanton) has elbowed me deliberately he backed in and hit out on purpose. In the tunnel at the end of the game he's come up to me and said 'I thought I was gone' but that's football. If the ref had done his job he'd have sent him off for that. He didn't but gave the penalty pretty sharply.

"They had two good strikers who were hard to deal with. In this league you get strikers who back into you a lot but you have to cope with it.

"I don't want to use the recent games as an excuse but maybe it's caught up with us. We will be looking to get back to winning ways on Tuesday night against Brentford."

His manager was equally damning of the West Midlands official but was saving his choice words for tomorrow.

"When I go into work on Monday I get a sheet to mark the referee on his performance today. I'll hand that in and make my thoughts known," he said.

"The penalty was not even a penalty none of their players appeared to call for it. Micky Spillane got elbowed in the face in front of the ref and he gave him a yellow. I don't want to see players get sent off but the referee saw him get elbowed. Next question."

Harford admitted it wasn't all Bratt's fault as his own side's shortcoming were clear to see.

"Obviously it hinged on the first goal where we fell asleep," he said. "In the first half we had more possession than Rochdale but we didn't create.

"We weren't as good in the final third as I want us to be.

"I don't want to use it as an excuse because Rochdale played midweek as well but we looked tired out there. We've done a lot of travelling this week."

Referee Bratt declined to address the press at the final whistle.

The stats

24 LUTON

FOOTBALL LEAGUE TWO

1001DALL LL	100		
Friday Grimsby	3	B'mouth	3
Yesterday			0
Barnet	1	Macclesfield	3
Brentford	1	Darlington	1
Bury	4	Gillingham	0
Chesterfield	1	Acc'ton St'ley	1
Chester	0	Aldershot	1
Dag & Red	6	Notts County	1
Lincoln City	0	Shrewsbury	0
Morecambe	1	Exeter	1
Rochdale	2	Luton	0
Rotherham	0	Bradford	2
Wycombe	4	Port Vale	2
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THE SQUAD

Logan; Gnakpa, Roper, Spillane, Keane; McVeigh (Worley 79), Hall, Jarvis, O'Connor (Talbot 60); Martin, Gallen. Subs: Brill, Beavan, Farthing.

LEAGUE TWO TABLE

	HOMET							AWAY						
1	WYCOMBE	16	5	3	0	13	6	4	4	0	7	2	12	34
2	DARLINGTON	17	5	2	1	15	6	4	3	2	15	9	15	32
3	ROCHDALE	17	5	2	2	18	9	3	4	1	11	9	11	30
4	BRADFORD	17	4	3	1	16	11	5	0	4	15	11	9	30
5	SHREWSBURY	17	6	1	1	24	5	1	6	2	9	10	18	28
6	BURY	17	4	1	4	12	9	4	3	1	14	9	8	28
7	BRENTFORD	17	4	4	1	14	7	3	3	2	7	6	8	28
8	EXETER	17	3	2	3	10	11	5	2	2	13	9	3	28
9	DAG & RED	17	5	3	1	24	6	3	0	5	11	13	16	27
10	GILLINGHAM	17	6	1	1	18	3	2	2	5	7	22	0	27
11	ALDERSHOT	17	5	3	0	14	9	2	0	7	8	20	-7	24
12	CHESTERFIELI	17	3	3	3	14	11	3	2	3	15	13	5	23
13	LINCOLN CITY	17	3	4	2	11	8	3	1	4	7	9	1	23
14	ACCRINGTON	17	3	1	4	11	10	2	3	4	8	11	-2	19
15	PORT VALE	17	2	0	6	8	18	4	1	4	12	12	-10	19
16	NOTTS CNTY	17	1	5	2	8	9	2	4	3	15	18	4	18
17	MORECAMBE	17	2	5	2	11	11	1	3	4	8	16	-8	17
18	MACCLESF'LD	16	2	0	6	9	20	3	2	3	10	11	-12	17
19	CHESTER	17	2	2	5	12	12	1	2	5	7	22	-15	13
20	BARNET	17	1	2	6	7	17	2	2	4	12	20	-18	13
21	GRIMSBY	17	0	-4	5	9	16	1	3	4	5	17	-19	10
22	ROTHERHAM	17	4	2	3	14	11	3	3	2	8	9	2	9
23	BOURNEM'TH	16	2	3	3	7	7	1	3	4	11	19	-8	-2

16 2 2 3 10 11 3 2 4 8 12 -5 -11

MAN OF THE MATCH



DREW TALBOT

Good to see him playing again

MATCH FACTS

SHOTS ON TARGET: ROCHDALE 4 LUTON 1

SHOTS OFF TARGET: ROCHDALE 6 LUTON

BOOKINGS:

ROCHDALE Wiseman 81, Stanton 82

LUTON: O'Connor 38, Martin 65, Keane 80, Logan '84

REFEREE: Steve Bratt (West Midlands) ATTENDANCE: 2,901