

Elbow adds insult to injury for Town

Rochdale 2 Luton Town 0

LUIS centre-half Michael Spillane's battered nose from a deliberate elbow added insult to injury for the Hatters as a series of bizarre refereeing decisions exacerbated their patchy performance at a freezing Spalding, writes Mark Wood.

Whistle-happy ref Steve Bratt booked six players and awarded 48 free-kicks on a largely innocuous afternoon in Rochdale, but his bizarre performance left an indelible mark on the game and played a large part in both of Dale's goals.

He also chose to show Nathan Stanton only a yellow card when he deliberately elbowed Spillane with eight minutes left - which left the Norwich youngster with a reddened nose.

Spillane said: "The geezer has said he has elbowed me and thought he was gone. He has caught me a treat."

"It was intentional. He has backed into me and elbowed me."

"We shook hands after the game. Really the ref should have done his job and sent him off. He didn't mind giving the penalty pretty sharp."

Town's centre-half pairing of Spillane and Ian Roper were kept busy all afternoon and the Hatters never really got going as they froze in icy conditions in Lancashire.

He said: "It was busy. They had two big strikers who were lively."

"Lee Thorpe was a big striker today and he was hard to handle. I think we were unlucky to lose 2-0 in the end, but that's football."

"First half I didn't think they were any better than us."

"We looked like we were going to score, but second half we weren't that good."

"We've had a lot of games and maybe it's caught up with us but it's not any excuse."

And he backed striker Drew Talbot to come back after his injury hell, after seeing the red-headed forward denied by a wonder save late in the game.



YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING: Referee Steve Bratt angers the Hatters with his penalty decision, right, and Michael Spillane collapses after being elbowed in the face, above



Spillane added: "He has got it on target and the keeper has made a really good save."

"He has been out for ages and it will take time and he will get his fitness back and the goals will come."

Depleted Town started slowly and it took Dale less than two minutes to take the lead.

A harshly awarded free-kick against Keith Keane was taken quickly and Scott Wiseman's near post cross was met by Thorpe's diving header into the bottom right-hand corner.

The hosts were all over the Hatters and Thorpe should have doubled their tally on five minutes, but Spillane's flick just put off the Dale hitman.

Another ball over the top caused consternation in Town's defence on 12 minutes.

Gary Jones' first time square ball found Thorpe in plenty of space, but

a great last-ditch tackle from Jarvis was just enough to put Thorpe off, whose effort drifted inches over the bar.

Claude Gnaka had a snapshot blocked on 14 minutes, while Chris Martin's spin and strike was off target on 28 minutes, but these chances did little to stem the Rochdale tide.

With the whistle constantly going, Dale went close again on the stroke of half time when Tom Kennedy swept yet another free-kick into Luton's box, but Rory McArdle flashed his header wide.

Kevin Gallen's through ball set Martin free on 54 minutes, but his run was brought to an end 30 yards out by the challenge of Stanton.

Gallen, though, could only smash the resulting free-kick into the defensive wall.

And Bratt continued his string of bizarre decisions when he penalised

Ian Roper - the subject of partizan home appeals all afternoon - for a foul on McArdle at a 58th minute corner. Adam Le Fondre then stepped up to power home the resulting penalty.

Town carved out a decent chance on 68 minutes when Roper flicked on a deep free-kick to Martin, but he could only fire well over after working himself some space on the edge of the area.

Le Fondre should have made it 3-0 with 14 minutes to go after good work down the left by Thorpe, while Sam Russell pulled off an unbelievable stop to deny the Hatters two minutes later.

Substitute Drew Talbot met Paul McVeigh's inviting cross with a firm downward header at the far post, but Russell somehow threw out a foot to deny the diminutive striker.

Logan pulled off a decent stop to deny Joe Thompson with only three minutes left, while Harry Worley had a late effort well blocked.

WHAT MICK MADE OF IT



DESPITE a request from the press, referee Steve Bratt declined to explain his performance after the final whistle.

In a far from ill-tempered affair, the West Midlands official awarded a total of 48 free-kicks and booked seven players during the course of the game that was marred by his constant whistling and left both sets of supporters disgruntled by his poor performance.

Manager Mick Harford admitted that he felt Bratt's performance had spoiled the game.

He said: "When I go into work on Monday I get a sheet and I can comment on the referee's performance. I'll hand that in and make my thoughts known."

"There was no flow to the game for both sides."

"The penalty was never a penalty and no Rochdale players appealed for it."

Harford also criticised Bratt's handling of the incident that saw Michael Spillane left with a battered nose following an encounter with Nathan Stanton's elbow.

On the game, Harford said: "It hinged on the first goal, which was scored very early when we went to sleep."

"They took a quick free-kick and we weren't set for it."

"First half we had a lot of the ball and a lot of possession, probably more than Rochdale, but didn't create much. The penalty has changed the game and we started to chase it."

Luton's best chance fell to Drew Talbot late in the second half, but any chance of a Town comeback was dashed by a fine save from Sam Russell.

Harford added: "Drew got in a good position and fair play to the keeper, he has made a good save. Second half we didn't get going."

"We've had to do a lot of travelling recently and second half we looked a bit tired."

Upton nets first goal for England

HATTERS: Former Luton Town defender Matthew Upton was on target for England as they recorded a 2-1 win against Germany in Berlin on Wednesday.

The West Ham centre-back, who was at Kenilworth Road between 1994 and 1997, stabilised home England's opener and his first goal for his country in the 24th minute after a corner was not cleared by the German defence.

Patrick Helmes made the most of a mix-up between John Terry and Scott Carson to net an equaliser in the 63rd minute before Upton's defensive partner John Terry scored the winner 11 minutes later.

STAR HATTER Michael Spillane. Heartwarming performance.

All over by Christmas? The 2008/09 season so far...

	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
AUG				7,149	24
Sat 9	PORT VALE	1-3	Parkin 35	2,882	-
Tue 12	PLYMOUTH (LGCPI)	2-0	Jarvis 15, Plummer 77	5,339	24
Sat 16	Gillingham	1-0	Parkin 9	6,085	24
Sat 23	NOTTS COUNTY	1-1	Martin 49	7,498	-
Tue 26	Reading (LGCPI)	1-5	Charles 81	5,329	24
Sat 30	Exeter City	1-0	Parkin 47	-	-
Sep				2,349	24
Sat 6	Macclesfield	1-2	Charles 90	6,462	24
Sat 13	ALDERSHOT TN	3-1	Spillane 17, Hall 89, Martin 90	4,095	24
Sat 19	Rotherham	0-1	-	5,731	24
Sat 27	CHESTER CITY	1-1	Hall 41	-	-
Oct				13,063	24
Tue 4	Bradford City	1-1	Spillane 86	2,029	-
Tue 7	BRENTFORD (JP2)	2-2	Martin 39, 55 (won 4-3 on pens)	5,560	24
Sat 11	DARLINGTON	1-2	Gnaka 31	5,492	24
Sat 18	ACCRINGTON	1-2	Hall 34	4,021	24
Tue 21	Grimsby Town	2-2	Craddock 24, 90	3,052	24
Sat 25	Bury	2-1	Craddock 35, Roper 44	-	-
Tue 28	BOURNEMOUTH	ABANDONED DUE TO SNOW	-	-	-
Nov				6,188	24
Sat 1	Shrewsbury	0-3	-	1,844	-
Tue 4	Walsall (JP3)	1-0	Jarvis 90	3,200	-
Sat 8	ALTRINGHAM (FA1)	0-0	-	5,402	24
Sat 15	DAGENHAM & RED	2-1	Davis 6, McVeigh 41	2,397	-
Tue 18	Altricham (FA1R)	0-0	Luton won 4-2 on penalties	2,901	24
Tue 22	Rochdale	0-2	-	5,248	24
Tue 25	BRENTFORD	0-1	-	-	-
Dec				-	-
Tue 2	BOURNEMOUTH	-	-	-	-
Sat 6	BARNET	-	-	-	-

	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
DEC					
Sat 13	Wycombe	-	-	-	-
Tue 16	COLCHESTER (JP4)	-	-	-	-
Sat 20	MORECAMBE	-	-	-	-
Fin 25	Chesterfield	-	-	-	-
Sun 28	LINCOLN CITY	-	-	-	-
JAN					
Sat 3	Chester City	-	-	-	-
Sat 10	ROTHERHAM	-	-	-	-
Sat 17	Darlington	-	-	-	-
Sat 24	BRADFORD CITY	-	-	-	-
Tue 27	Bournemouth	-	-	-	-
Sat 31	BURY	-	-	-	-
FEB					
Tue 3	GRIMSBY TOWN	-	-	-	-
Sat 7	Accrington	-	-	-	-
Sat 14	Dagenham & Red	-	-	-	-
Sat 21	SHREWSBURY	-	-	-	-
Sat 28	Port Vale	-	-	-	-
MAR					
Tue 3	GILLINGHAM	-	-	-	-
Sat 7	EXETER CITY	-	-	-	-
Tue 10	Notts County	-	-	-	-
Sat 14	Aldershot Town	-	-	-	-
Sat 21	MACCLESFIELD	-	-	-	-
Sat 28	Mossley	-	-	-	-
APR					
Sat 4	WYCOMBE	-	-	-	-
Sat 11	Lincoln City	-	-	-	-
Mon 13	CHESTERFIELD	-	-	-	-
Sat 18	Barnet	-	-	-	-
Sat 25	ROCHDALE	-	-	-	-