

Hatters reach zero but points dropped

CHESTER CITY 2

Lowe '37' (pen), Ellison '51'

LUTON TOWN 2

Martin '22', Emanuel '27'

Football League Two
Deva Stadium

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IT was supposed to be a celebration time when Luton Town reached the magic zero mark but as they finally extinguished that record points penalty last night with this draw it felt more like two points dropped.

Yes the Hatters can now start the second half of the season with a clean slate.

Yes they are now eight games unbeaten, but there still seem to be things conspiring against them – and this time it was sparked by a dubious penalty decision given against them.

A dominant first 39 minutes with goals from top scorer Chris Martin and Lewis Emanuel certainly seemed to signal a strong dose of start as you mean to go for their first match of 2009.

But not for the first time this season Luton can feel hard done by with a referee's performance because when Karl Evans pointed to the spot six minutes from time it

gave Chester a chance in a game in which they had looked well and truly inferior.

And the equaliser on 51 minutes was just rotten luck.

Only one change was made to the Luton side that ended 2008 in victory against Lincoln City with new striker Ian Henderson going straight into the starting line-up to make his Hatters debut in place of Drew Talbot.

It meant that manager Mick Harford had gone for an attacking formation of 4-3-3 with Kevin Gallen moved back from his usual forward role to accompany Keith Keane and Rossi Jarvis in midfield.

It told in the frenetic early stages as Town dominated the opening exchanges and Tom Craddock should have put them in front on seven minutes. Henderson's cheeky back-heel found the young Middlesborough loan signing with a clear run on goal, but as he pulled the trigger City keeper John Danby was down at his feet in a flash to block.

Town took the lead on 22 minutes after Gallen found Chris Martin on the edge of the Blues' penalty area. With two defenders for company Martin produced a top class turn to give them both the slip so he could pick his spot with a thunderous drive into the far corner for his seventh of the season.

Emanuel doubled the lead on 27 minutes with bullet free-kick from 25 yards that left Danby with no chance. It owed some thanks to referee Karl Evans who had ordered a retake after City's James Vaughan was booked for breaking too early from the wall to block the defender's initial effort.

Evans' decision saw the crowd single him out. It seemed to have some effect because he awarded the softest of penalties to the home side on 37 minutes.

Ryan Lowe played a free-kick into the box leaving Ellison to chase away from goal with Michael Spillane in tow. There seemed to be minimal, if any, contact and the referee pointed to the spot for Lowe to convert.

A half that held so much promise ended on a sour note as Emanuel was floored by Vaughan just before the break. He received nine minutes of medical attention on the pitch before he was stretchered off to be replaced by Jake Howells.

It certainly incensed Mick Harford who remonstrated with Evans as he walked off the pitch at half-time.

The Blues equalised six minutes after the restart from Lowe's corner with Ellison reacting first to scramble the ball in after Logan had initially blocked Shaun Kelly's point blank header.

It was end to end stuff and



NO WAY THROUGH: Rossi Jarvis' path is blocked. For more pictures of the game see inside

another goal looked likely but all the threat was with Chester. And they should have done better on 71 minutes when for the second time Ellison was allowed a free run in the Town half. He squared to Lowe but fortunately for Luton he hesitated before shooting and the chance was gone.

There was to no late miracles for Luton but at least that biggest of hurdles has now been jumped.

LUTON: Logan, Keane (c), Roper, Henderson, Emanuel, Jarvis, Martin (Howells, 40), Spillane, Beavan, Craddock, Gallen
Subs (not used): Brill, Gankpa, McVeigh, Hall

Attendance: 1652 (370 Luton)

Referee: Karl Evans (Greater Manchester)

LEAGUE TWO TABLE

		HOME						AWAY						GD	P
		P	W	D	L	F	A	P	W	D	L	F	A		
1	Wycombe	24	7	5	0	20	8	6	5	1	13	6		19	
2	Brentford	23	6	4	1	18	8	5	5	2	13	9		14	
3	Bradford	24	6	6	1	24	14	5	1	5	16	13		13	
4	Bury	25	6	2	4	18	11	5	4	4	18	16		9	
5	Dag & Red	23	6	3	1	26	6	5	2	6	20	18		27	
6	Shrewsbury	24	9	1	2	28	7	1	7	4	10	13		18	
7	Darlington	23	6	4	2	20	11	4	4	3	17	12		14	
8	Rochdale	23	7	3	2	24	12	3	5	3	14	16		10	
9	Exeter	23	5	3	4	17	16	5	3	3	15	12		4	
10	Gillingham	23	7	4	1	23	7	2	3	6	9	26		-1	
11	Aldershot	22	7	4	1	22	15	3	0	7	11	20		-2	
12	Lincoln City	24	4	6	2	18	11	4	1	7	11	16		2	3
13	Chesterfield	23	3	4	4	18	17	4	3	5	19	18		2	28
14	Notts County	24	3	5	5	11	16	3	4	4	16	20		-9	27
15	Macclesfield	23	4	1	7	14	26	4	2	5	15	21		-18	27
16	Port Vale	23	4	1	7	12	21	4	1	6	12	16		-13	26
17	Morecambe	23	4	5	2	16	12	1	5	6	9	22		-9	25
18	Chester	23	4	3	5	18	14	2	3	7	10	27		-13	24
19	AccStanley	23	4	1	6	16	16	2	3	7	10	21		-11	22
20	Rotherham	23	5	3	3	16	12	5	4	3	15	12		7	20
21	Barnet	24	1	3	7	9	22	3	4	6	17	26		-22	19
22	Grimsby	23	1	4	6	10	17	1	4	7	9	25		-23	14
23	Bournemouth	24	4	4	4	10	9	1	5	6	16	27		-10	7
24	Luton	24	4	4	4	20	19	3	5	4	12	16		-3	0