

Town toss it away

by Carl Field

HATTERS chalked out their crippling 30-point deficit but will surely be kicking themselves after tossing away a 2-0 lead in a thrilling League Two clash at the Deva Stadium.

Town were cruising just before the half-hour mark thanks to fine strikes from Chris Martin and Lewis Emanuel, but those were not enough to ultimately secure what would have been a vital three points.

The result did make it eight matches unbeaten for Luton, although the game was marred by a serious-looking injury to Emanuel in the latter stages of the first half.

Manager Mick Harford made just one change to the side that started the 3-2 home win over Lincoln City on December 28, with new signing Ian Henderson being handed his Hatters bow in place of Drew Talbot, who dropped out of the squad altogether.

Loan striker Tom Craddock had the first shot of the evening in the second minute, but his weak effort from the right-hand side of the box was high and wide of the target.

Luton went close to taking the lead in the seventh minute and only a smart block from goalkeeper John Danby denied Craddock the opener after Henderson's neat back heel had given him a clear sight of goal.

Harford's side certainly started the brighter of the two sides and the lively front three combination were having a lot of joy in the final third and got in behind the Chester back four on numerous occasions.

And, on 11 minutes, only a late deflection diverted Rossi Jarvis' shot from the edge of the 18-yard box away from goal for a corner.

Less than a minute later though, Chester had their first real promising attack of the match and, with a two against one situation, striker Kevin Ellison really should have done better than fire a weak shot straight at Conrad Logan.

The hosts then went close again almost immediately when Laurence Wilson sent in a teasing low cross that flashed across the goalmouth, but none of his team-mates could touch the ball home.

But it was Town who continued to dominate the play and it was no surprise when they did take the lead on 23 minutes.

The goal arrived when veteran striker Kevin Gallen, playing in a



FALSE DAWN: Chris Martin fires home Town's opening goal, but they had to settle for a draw in Chester

Chester City 2 Luton Town 2

midfield role, slipped a delightful ball out to Martin on the left-hand edge of the penalty area. And the on-loan Norwich City youngster made no mistake with the finish, firing a shot beyond Danby and into the top right-hand corner.

Chester, though, were agonisingly close to getting themselves back on level terms almost immediately, when striker Ryan Lowe spotted Logan over on the right-hand touchline bounced just the wrong side of the post.

Hatters never looked rattled though and duly doubled their lead on 27 minutes, when left-back Emanuel crashed a free-kick from fully 30 yards through the wall and into the bottom right-hand corner of the net, past the despairing dive of Danby.

However, Town threw Chester a lifeline on 35 minutes when Michael Spillane hauled Ellison down in the box, giving the referee no option but to point to the spot. And Lowe made no mistake with the resultant penalty, halving his side's deficit.

Moments after the goal, play was

halted when goalscorer Emanuel needed medical attention after going down with a serious-looking leg injury.

Jake Howells was eventually brought on in his place, with the referee adding on nine minutes at the end of the first half following the stoppage in play.

Having looked dead and buried at one stage, Chester then forced an equaliser six minutes into the second half.

Shaun Kelly's powerful header from a Lowe corner brought a reaction save out of Logan, but Ellison was on hand to stab the loose ball

STAR HATTER Chris Martin. All-action show and took goal well.

CHESTER CITY



Unused subs: Platt, Rutherford, McManus

LUTON TOWN



Unused subs: Brill, Gnaka, McVeigh, Hall

Referee: Karl Evans (Greater Manchester)

Attendance: 1,652 (370 Luton)

into the net inside a crowded box to make it 2-2.

After a poor start, the hosts were starting to give a good account of themselves and, along with a lively Luton side, played their part in an entertaining end-to-end game.

Stand-in skipper Keith Keane was almost left to rue a mistake on 71 minutes when he allowed Ellison to steal the ball on the halfway line and surge forward with two men in support against only one Luton defender.

But, fortunately for Luton, Lowe's shot hit the last remaining defender and looped up easily for Logan - although it was certainly a let off for the visitors.

As the game entered the closing stages, the hosts began to launch some promising attacks as they searched for what would have been an unlikely winner considering Town's earlier advantage.

A neat through ball split Luton's defence on 84 minutes, but the final ball into Damien Mozzika had just a bit too much weight on it and Logan gathered, while Ian Roper needed to make a last-ditch tackle to prevent Lowe having a run on goal in the last minute.

Still there was time for one last chance when Spillane went agonisingly close to snatching a dramatic winner in stoppage time. But his flick from an inswinging Jarvis free-kick ended up inches wide of the post.