

Harford risks FA wrath with referee outburst...

LUTON TOWN 3
Hall 4, 90, Waisu 37

BRADFORD CITY 3
McLaren 47, Furman 57,
Conlon 90 (pen)

League Two
Kenilworth Road

BY TOM LEECH
sport@lismedia.co.uk

LUTON TOWN could face further charges this season after the FA launched an investigation into crowd trouble at the tumultuous finish of the Hatters' clash with Bradford on Saturday.

With the home side ahead in the final minute referee Trevor Kettle awarded the Bantams a penalty deep into injury time and the Berkshire official is alleged to have had missiles thrown at him as he left the pitch.

An FA spokesman confirmed: "We are looking into the incident involving the referee at the end of the game.

"Mention of missiles being thrown was brought to our attention in the referee's report.

"We will be liaising with the club and the police to try to identify individuals.

"We want to see the strongest possible sanctions taken against those people who may have been involved in this incident."

But that is only half the story of a truly extraordinary match.

Banishing the memories of the thrashing at Darlington, Luton raced into a two-goal lead in the first half.

The Bradford support may have had a drummer with them in the away end but it was the Hatters who set the tempo. First to every ball Mick Harford's men hassled and harried their way to the lead just four minutes in.

With captain Keith Keane withdrawing from the starting line-up with a hamstring injury sustained in the warm up, stand-in skipper Rossi Jarvis led by example driving his corner to the near post for Asa Hall to glance in a header.

So far so good, but the man in the middle soon began to steal the limelight with some questionable decisions that inflamed both sets of fans.

First Hatters were scratching their heads when Ian Henderson, who impressed on his home debut, had to leave the pitch and change shirts after a clash of heads. Moments later he was back, yet strangely Kettle ignored the Kenilworth Road crowd's howls by refusing to let him back on.

It was soon Bradford's turn to let off some steam at Mr Kettle when he gave a free kick and a yellow card to left back Luke O'Brien for a challenge that both managers agreed afterwards was perfectly timed. From the resulting set piece, another Jarvis cross led to a goal, this time for Ioanee Sunday Waisu. The ball dropped between goalkeeper Rhys Evans and the

THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER: Asa Hall heads in the injury time goal that everyone in Kenilworth Road thought was the winner... but they had reckoned without Mr Kettle's late penalty decision



Colchester United striker but Waisu got there first bundling in his first goal for the Hatters.

Not everyone was celebrating however as Bradford boss Stuart McCall was sent to the stands at the restart for arguing O'Brien's earlier tackle. Rather than walk round to the tunnel the canny Scot hopped over the advertising hoardings and sat in the executive boxes for the remainder of the game.

From his privileged position McCall witnessed his side's amazing recovery within 12 minutes of the second half when Luton's fragile defence went AWOL. Bradford's first came from ex-Hatter Paul McLaren and their second from Andrew Furman.

It made for an unbearably tense finish as both sides made a claim for the win in a topsy-turvy game but it looked like finally, the luck was with the Hatters.

Spirits were lifted when Harford introduced Kevin Nicholls and when Luton won a free kick on the edge of the box it fell to Nico to take control. Rather than go for goal the combative midfielder showed a delicate touch floating the ball to the far post for Hall to dart a header into the top corner.

That should have been it, three points on the board, job done. Instead Luton had to settle for a solitary point when from a desperate final long punt down the field

Mr Kettle spotted something in a crowded penalty area and awarded the spot kick.

It baffled the players and crowd alike and tempers threatened to boil over. In the melee Chris Martin was sent off and yellow cards were handed out to Nicholls and Michael Spillane. Conrad Logan couldn't play the hero in goal as Bantams' sub Barry Conlon stroked the ball into the net from the penalty spot.

At the final whistle McCall expressed his disappointment with Mr Kettle's performance, backed by Luton boss Harford.

"Obviously they're going to pump the ball forward with a minute left of injury time and the ref has given a bizarre penalty which was never ever a penalty," the Hatters manager said.

"The referee in my opinion, for both teams, was incompetent. I feel sorry for the fans who had to pay to see it, it was unjust. He played a massive part in the result."

Harford also revealed he'd clashed with Mr Kettle before: "I was manager of Rotherham and we played at Barnsley and he sent three of my players off plus me and two weeks later I got the sack. We were winning then we conceded a late goal in the 94th minute with a goal where the ball didn't cross the line. I know what this referee's about.

"I'm just an honest fella, it's despicable what's gone on in terms of a referee's performance like that. I'm not bothered if they (the FA) charge me, I'm just telling you the truth. There were 6,000 people here and what I'll try and do is voice their opinions. I'm sure I'm just echoing what they're thinking. I'm not going to skirt around the issue.

"My opinion of his performance is backed by the crowd, two sets of players and two sets of management staff. I can't be honest without being critical and overstepping the mark."

Goalscorer Hall notched his first league double but had a mixed afternoon, holding his hands up for the controversial penalty decision.

"I think they've given it against me," he said. "The ball has come long and their striker's taken it, I've touched it and he's gone down. There were quite a few bodies in there. It was never a penalty, no chance.

"We're feeling the pressure every week but we're trying our hardest out there for the crowd and the fans are just unbelievable. Then to get the lead again in the 90th minute and not win was devastating.

"From the elation of scoring late on and the noise from the crowd for the ref to do something like that is inexplicable."

... and fuming captain also lets rip at official

"I CAN'T say too much because I'm going to get in trouble", was Kevin Nicholls' opening line as the Luton skipper tried to come to terms with Saturday's dramatic ending.

Addressing the press still in his Luton kit the midfielder was still fuming at referee Trevor Kettle's display.

He said: "With this RESPECT rule as club captain I'm supposed to go over and speak to him."

"I asked what he'd given it for and he said 'he clipped him, Kevin. I said 'who clipped him?' - he didn't even know what Luton Town player was involved."

"And I got booked for it as well. Just for asking. If you look I was trying to get our players away from him to help him and he still booked me."

"I know sometimes it's hard for referees to deal with me but I know, and I respect the referee, how much this club means to me. I've gone over, done the right thing and, as usual, Luton Town get punished."

"As you get older you do start to respect the referee and linesman more because you understand they've got a job to do and we all make mistakes but when I see a performance like that I find it very hard to understand why they're officiating games at this standard."

"We're talking about people's livelihoods here not just here's a penalty to even things up because that's how it feels."

Nicholls gave credit to the visitors and admitted they also had reason to complain about some of the Mr Kettle's decisions.

"At 2-0 we deserved our lead," he said. "We started well but I must say I thought Bradford were the better team in the second half. If we had won the game it would have been a great result but on reflection anyone who scores three goals away from home deserves something from the game."

"We shot ourselves in the foot because their two goals before the penalty were poor on our behalf. Football's a crazy game."

"I was sitting on the bench and I could see things - it wasn't just against Luton. The game, as a whole, was poorly officiated."

Looking to the future the fans' favourite reiterated his dedication to the club and he hopes his injuries that have restricted him to just 11 games since his summer return to Kenilworth Road are behind him.

"I made a big decision to come back to the club, this club means a lot to me," he said. "They're good lads here and it's a good football club. I just hope we do it proud and keep our league status."

"It's not about Kevin Nicholls or Mick Harford it's about this club keeping its league status. Unfortunately it seems the FA are making it as hard as possible for us."

The stats

SHOTS ON TARGET:	OFF TARGET:
LUTON 5	LUTON 4
BRADFORD 6	BRADFORD 11

BOOKINGS:
LUTON TOWN: ROPER 50, NICHOLLS 90, SPILLANE 90, MARTIN 90 (RED)
BRADFORD CITY: O'BRIEN 36, LAW 45, ARNISON 53, THORNE 71

REFEREE: TREVOR KETTLE (BERKSHIRE)

THE SQUAD

Logan, Asafu-Adjaye, Roper, Spillane, Davis, Jarvis, Hall, Gailen (Nicholls 71), Henderson (Howells 90), Martin, Waisu (Parkin 75), Subs: Brill, Gnaka



IAN HENDERSON

The winger disappeared in the second half, along with his teammates, but his crosses were spot on throughout