

Championship form needed now

LUTON TOWN 1

Hall 36

BURY 2

Bishop 57, Morrell 66

League Two
Kenilworth Road

BY TOM LEECH

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IT'S now 12 wins out of the final 18 games that Luton will need to win to avoid what is beginning to look like the inevitable slide out of the Football League.

Manager Mick Harford revealed that that is the target he has set his players to avoid the drop midweek, but this defeat to Bury makes it just that much harder.

The Hatters now need championship-winning form when the club hasn't won back-to-back league games since 2006 and the current side would struggle to win a raffle.

Yet to taste victory in 2009, the division's draw specialists took the lead against Bury through Asa Hall's fierce effort but fell to second-half goals from Andy Bishop and Andy Morrell.

On a bitterly cold afternoon Luton had the first chance of any note against a side they beat in the corresponding fixture back in October.

Captain Kevin Nicholls' free kick spun up in the area and unfortunately Michael Spillane showed a defender's finish, spooning his volley wide from a good position.

Bury sat just outside the top two before kick-off and the promotion-chasers had the lion's share of the half. They should have taken the lead when from a corner, right-back Paul Scott squeezed in a shot at the far post that Sol Davis had to block on the line.

Celebrating making his move to Luton permanent Tom Craddock must have thought he'd scored his first in a full-time Hatters' shirt on 25 minutes when he connected beautifully with a volley from a corner.

An inch either side of Mark Tyler and it would have burst the net but the Bury keeper pulled off an

instinctive save to keep out the former loan-star.

That chance aside, the Shakers continued to pose the most threat and should have been at least two up before half-time. First Elliot Bennett, in acres of space, squared it for Bishop who rounded Conrad Logan but three Luton players got back to somehow thwart the striker on the line.

Moments later Morrell, 20 yards out, made room for a shot that cannoned off the inside of Logan's post and a collective sigh of relief rang out around the ground.

Luton were left off the hook and made Bury pay with a goal from nowhere on 36 minutes. Hatters returned to ten-men at the time as Nicholls had to leave the pitch to receive treatment after a clash of heads in Logan's area.

At the other end workhorse Kevin Gallen found Craddock on the edge of the box who tried to dribble round his marker but instead knocked the ball off the defender into the path of Hall. The midfielder did the rest, drilling his shot into the bottom corner.

With Luton's attacking formation continuing to leave huge gaps Bury finished the half strongly but at the break Harford switched back to 4-4-2.

Now, with four in midfield, Luton began the brighter and started to hold on to the ball rather than look for the quick long pass. Gallen provided a swirling cross that Craddock's free header couldn't trouble Tyler.

Logan's blushes were spared on 55 minutes when Morrell charged down the Irishman's kick. The Hatters goalkeeper had to scramble back to his line as Morrell chased the loose ball. As did his strike partner Bishop and the two collided with each other leaving a relieved Logan to gather.

But within the space of 11 minutes Luton surrendered the lead and found themselves behind.

Bury's first had more than a touch of fortune about it as Hall went to stop Bennett's right wing cross but instead his block looped over a stranded Logan and Bishop bundled Spillane and the ball into the net.



HEADING FOR DEFEAT: Sam Parkin gets in an attempt at goal in the defeat to Bury that makes Luton's escape from relegation even more unlikely

After a soul-destroying spell of 'keep ball' from the visitors Spillane's meaty challenge on Stephen Dawson cheered the Kenilworth Road crowd, but left a big hole at right back that Bennett exploited.

The winger got his cross in again and this time Morrell was first to the near post and the striker stooped a header inbetween Logan and the upright.

It effectively killed the game. There were minutes on the clock to make the difference but no-one in a white shirt looked like they would.

On-loan Colchester United forward Sunday Waisu was thrown on as Harford tried to stir his side into action against the Shakers.

In complete control Bury pressed for a third and only Waisu's fellow

loanee Mark Bower could keep them from it.

Bishop shrugged off his marker and rounded Logan before blasting towards an empty net. Bradford defender Bower was alert to the danger and booted the shot off the line and out for a throw.

The referee's assistant signalled three minutes added time but there was no roar from the crowd as Luton appeared to have resigned themselves to defeat the moment the Shakers scored their second.

■ Luton Town's game against Grimsby at Kenilworth Road last night was called off because of the adverse weather conditions. The match has been rearranged for Tuesday March 17, kick off at 7.45pm.

LEAGUE TWO TABLE

Wycombe	28	8	5	1	22	10	6	2	14	9	17	53
Brentford	27	7	5	1	22	9	6	5	3	16	17	49
Bury	29	8	2	4	21	12	6	5	4	20	17	48
Darlington	27	8	4	2	26	12	5	4	4	18	13	49
Gillingham	28	8	4	2	25	9	5	3	6	14	27	46
Rochdale	27	8	4	2	29	14	5	4	5	20	21	45
Bradford	26	7	7	1	27	15	5	2	6	19	17	45
Dag & Red	26	7	3	3	30	11	5	4	6	22	20	43
Shrewsbury	28	10	1	3	30	10	1	9	4	11	14	43
Exeter	26	6	4	4	19	17	6	3	5	18	16	44
Chesterfield	27	4	4	5	21	20	6	3	5	23	19	5
Lincoln City	28	4	6	2	22	15	5	2	7	15	19	3
Aldershot	27	1	6	2	27	22	3	0	9	12	25	-6
Notts County	29	4	6	2	15	19	3	6	5	19	26	-11
Macclesfield	27	5	2	7	16	24	3	6	16	24	-18	-32
Port Vale	28	5	2	8	17	25	4	2	7	15	21	-14
Morecambe	27	4	6	3	17	14	2	5	7	11	24	-10
Accrington	25	2	6	18	17	2	4	8	12	24	-11	-27
Rotherham	27	3	3	19	12	5	4	5	15	16	6	26
Chester	28	4	3	19	18	2	4	8	11	31	-19	25
Barnet	28	1	5	17	20	3	5	7	19	29	-23	22
Grimsby	27	5	6	14	18	2	4	8	10	27	-21	21
Bournemouth	28	5	4	14	11	1	6	7	19	31	-9	12
24 Luton	28	4	5	5	24	24	3	6	5	14	22	-8

The stats

SHOTS ON TARGET:

LUTON 3
BURY 9

OFF TARGET:

LUTON 7
BURY 8

BOOKINGS:

LUTON TOWN:-
BURY:-

REFEREE: FRED GRAHAM (ESSEX)

THE SQUAD

Logan; Spillane (Gnakpa 77), Asafu-Adjaye, Bower, Davis (Howells 64), Nicholls, Hall, Gallen (Waisu 70), Henderson, Parkin, Craddock, Subs: Brill, Jarvis

ASA HALL

The midfielder wasn't particularly great but he took his goal tally up to six for the season with a fine drive



COMMENT

presumably for the Israeli's outrageously illegal shielding the ball tactics? You betcha.

Here's where it links to Luton. An FA investigation on Monday, after watching video replays of the horror challenge from every conceivable angle, Bosingwa was absolved of any wrong-doing. No retrospective slap on the wrists, no ban, no fine, no nothing.

Mick Harford, now currently awaiting the investigation into improper conduct after the Bradford game last week.

Of course, charges like these are never explained and are suitably woolly. Which is fine because football fans are never ones to jump to conclusion based on conjecture are they? Regardless, my guess is that

Harford probably used some colourful language. Can you blame him?

Well, his team were only hit by a decision that robbed his team of three points. Three points that, arguably, would be more valuable to the Hatters than any other team in the 91 places above them.

Harford is a man in charge of a club decimated by a record points penalty tasked with the almost impossible job of keeping them in the Football League.

They scored late on to give them hope that the great escape might still have a chance, then a dubious penalty decision takes that away from them.

Yes, perhaps a little restraint would have been required but football is a passionate game. The reaction after the Bradford game was the outpouring of frustration from a boss and a beleaguered

set of fans, beaten with various FA sticks for the last 18 months. To quote a national newspaper:

'The team at the bottom of the table should be the worst side in the league, not the club with the idiot accountant.'

But at the bottom of the league and starting into the abyss is where Luton are, helped in no large part by penalty points dished out by the FA.

At worst Luton's current run-in with the suits as Soho Square could result in more points docked. But one would hope that without the television cameras to show slow motion replays of the alleged offence, and a little sympathy for their plight, the club will be absolved of any wrong doing.

But then again perhaps the Hatters boss should change his name to Miguel Harfordio.

JAMES CUNLIFFE

WHAT you're about to read may shock you.

It seems that there's one rule for the rich, like Chelsea, and another for the poor, like Luton.

OK, I lied. It's not a new notion, particularly for Hatters fans. But if you sat at home, watching transfer deadline day unfold, pulling a sickie because of the white stuff outside, there was one bit of news that would have confirmed this for you.

Among all the news that Manchester City had put in a last minute £100 million bid for Barack Obama was the small matter of an FA decision.

On Sunday Portuguese defender Jose Bosingwa clattered Liverpool's Yossi Benayoun with a challenge that was more Bruce Lee than Chelsea. Was he booked? No. Sent off? No. Was he awarded a free-kick,