

Foster's Valentine's Day dagger through the heart

DAGENHAM & REDBRIDGE 2
Foster 20, 57

LUTON TOWN 1
Henderson 58

League Two
Victoria Road

BY TOM LEECH
sport@lsnmedia.co.uk

STOP me if you've heard this one before...

Luton Town struggled to find form away from home, had to go a goal down before they started playing, conceded preventable goals and came good at the end but ran out of time and still haven't won this year.

And just for good measure their captain and star player hobbled off injured an hour in and looks likely to be out for the next month.

For manager Mick Harford it's becoming depressingly like Groundhog Day with every game that passes.

"I'd like to change the record but I feel I'm repeating myself all the time," he said. "We were the better team for the majority of the game. We went 2-0 down but responded with a goal and from then on there was only one team trying to get something out of the game.

"Chances-wise we had four or five in the first half and more in the second half. When it got to 2-1 all Dagenham wanted to do was run the clock down. First 20 minutes we were poor but when we got to grips with the game there was only one team in it.

"Again it's a couple of defensive lapses that have cost us. That's the disappointing factor.

"At the moment Luton Town as a football club, me as a manager and the players are not getting the breaks. We're not getting what our football deserves in my opinion.

"Every game we play at the moment looks like we'll have to score three or four to win. We need to tighten up. We're leaking too many goals, it's been an ongoing thing this season and people have to take responsibility for it."

Responsibility for the first goal the Daggers scored 20 minutes in wasn't clear. Daggers' left back Matt Ritchie's pea roller of a pass into the box was allowed to travel to Ben Foster. No-one could be blamed for the right back's finish as he spun his marker before smashing the ball past Hatters' new on-loan keeper Lewis Price.

The goal woke up sluggish Luton and almost instantly Asa Hall's long range shot bounced off the inside of Daggers' veteran goalkeeper Tony Roberts' far post.

The stage was set for a second half comeback and another three points for the greatest of 'great escapes' from relegation. Instead Dagenham began the stronger and only Price's speed off his line could stop Jon Nurse clean through for a one-on-one.

Dagenham were without the league's injured top scorer Paul



BACKS TO THE WALL: Tom Craddock is foiled by Daggers keeper Tony Roberts

Benson but in his place defender Foster became the unlikely goal hero. Tricky winger Sam Saunders, who caused Luton problems all afternoon, drilled a cross to the near post that Foster, Price and Ian Roper between them diverted the ball over the line on 57 minutes.

On Valentine's Day, just to add a bit of heartache, Luton went straight up the other end and pulled a goal back to give the travelling away support hope.

A slick passing move between Rossi Jarvis and Tom Craddock teed up Ian Henderson just inside the box who finished with aplomb in the bottom corner for his first in a white shirt since his move from Northampton.

Captain Kevin Nicholls dragged his troops back to the half way line to begin again as quickly as possible but moments later he was subbed clutching his troublesome hamstring.

"It was the same leg but a different place," said Harford. "It doesn't look good and that typifies our situation at the moment. A talismanic figure like Nico has broken down again and he's more than disappointed. I'm sure he'll be out for several weeks. We have to get him 100 per cent fit."

With ten minutes to go, the obligatory kitchen sink – or Sam Parkin as he's more commonly known – was thrown on to try and retrieve at least a point along with Sunday Waisu.

Afterwards Harford insisted he hadn't given up the fight but it's beginning to look like a lost cause as the season begins to slip away.

Price is right – Hatters' defence needs sorting

LUTON'S on-loan goalkeeper Lewis Price sees plenty of potential in his new teammates but urged them to work on their shaky defence.

The Welsh international is at Kenilworth Road for a month from Derby County. The 24-year-old shot-stopper said: "We played well enough to at least get a draw and created enough to win.

"It's a good team. They work hard and create chances. It'll be a good one for the future but we need to start picking up results.

"We played some good stuff at times, we looked good going forward but defensively we didn't look the best. No offence to Dagenham but I don't think they're a very good team and if we'd started better it would have been a different story."

Price also insisted the decisive second was an Ian Roper own goal.

"I've saved the cross and it's hit Roper and gone in," he said. "It was an own goal. When I saved it I was thinking 'this must have gone forward' when all of a sudden it's in the back of the net. It was one of those freak goals but it almost sums up how it is."

■ HATTERS manager Mick Harford expects to have the book thrown at him and the club when they face FA charges relating to the Bradford City game in January.

Harford has been charged with improper conduct towards referee Trevor Kettle after the controversial 3-3 draw, as well as bringing the game into disrepute over comments to the press.

Captain Kevin Nicholls has been charged with improper conduct while to club have been charged with failing to control their players.

Harford said: "It's been a distraction and frustrating because I said things in the heat of the moment.

"With hindsight it's easy to say I should have kept my mouth shut, but we are in the results business so it was difficult.

"I'm not sure these people (the FA) have ever played the game, because when you do emotions run high. It's like banging your head against a brick wall and they'll throw they book at us."

He said he didn't know if, when he and Nicholls go to Soho Square to face the FA, whether they'll both be seen together. But he is adamant his captain did no wrong. "I'd like to go in with Kevin," he said. "The things that they say Kevin did are just not true."