

Cup final run in soured by defeat

LUTON TOWN 2

Martin 42, Hall 70

ROTHERHAM UNITED 4

Reid 11, Broughton 38, Harrison 53, Hudson 87

League Two

Kenilworth Road

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THIS wasn't meant to be – but the Millers proved a crossing too far for Luton Town who slumped to their seventh and heaviest home defeat of the season.

Off the back of three straight wins the Hatters were riding a wave of optimism, one that many in the town expected to lead them all the way to Wembley.

For large parts Mick Harford's men played the better football, but in truth they could have been Brazil 1974 and still would have lost because they gifted Rotherham four goals – and that's four that could prove very decisive as to how much longer the club will spend in the Football League.

What's more, if they do it again on Sunday the Wembley dream will almost certainly turn into a nightmare.

With an unchanged side from the one that beat Morecambe at the weekend Luton showed all the early promise, taking up permanent residence in the Rotherham's half.

There was, however, only one chance to show for their efforts when Kevin Nicholls arrowed a cross to Tom Craddock whose header went straight down the throat of keeper Andy Warrington.

It only seemed a matter of time before Town took the lead, not least because United didn't look at all in the mood – perhaps even slightly embarrassed that they are safe from the drop after their own 17 point deduction at the start

of the season. But then on 11 minutes Keith Keane's slip when trying to deal with a huge punt forward allowed in Reuben Reid. The striker didn't need to be asked twice and he descended on Dean Brill's goal, firing a low shot into the net.

There was no celebration however but more a sense of sympathy for Town's plight as United's players trudged back to the halfway line.

Referee Darren Deadman then decided that the game wasn't interesting enough and that it should be he who was the focus of attention.

First act of his 'how to lose friends and alienate people' showpiece was to book Chris Martin and Pablo Mills for the wettest 'handbags at dawn' scuffle of all time.

Second act was to be pedantic in the extreme, halting play and inciting fans. And he closed before half-time with an Arsene Wenger parody of 'I didn't see it', when numerous times both sides committed misdemeanours.

But nothing was as farcical as Luton gifting Rotherham a second goal. They failed to deal with a long throw and life-long Luton fan Drewe Broughton somehow managed to stab passed Brill despite being on his knees inside the six yard box.

Spirits were lifted four minutes from the break when Asa Hall picked out Martin, who with 15 yards to make up, was always going to be favourite as he powered a header in for his 12th goal of the season.

It was no more than the Hatters deserved but they don't half like shooting themselves in the foot.

They pulled the trigger again seven minutes after the restart, when again, the Millers barely had to expend any energy to re-establish the lead. Luton dabbled with a round of head tennis inside their box rather than clearing the ball and Danny Harrison merely directed his well enough from 15 yards to have Brill beaten all ends up. For a visiting team that looked almost reluctant to try it was far too easy.



Craddock thought he'd pulled one back on 66 minutes but a cruel deflection saw the ball spin inches wide of the upright. With 20 minutes remaining the mood inside Kenilworth Road had the air of a funeral parade that was slowly moving towards an inevitable final resting place.

Hall had different ideas though as he picked the ball up 25 yards out and hit a daisy-cutter into the bottom corner of the net to at least offer some hope.

Just as a reminder that the goal wasn't necessarily going to end in a fairytale comeback for Luton Dale Tonge rattled the angle of their cross bar and post a minute later.

Luton pressed for the equaliser but it left

LEAGUE TWO TABLE

		HOME					AWAY					GD	PTS
		P	W	D	L	F/A	P	W	D	L	F/A		
1	Brentford	39	11	7	2	33 14	8	7	4	20 16	23 71		
2	Bury	40	11	4	5	30 18	7	8	5	24 21	15 66		
3	Rochdale	40	10	6	4	39 21	8	5	7	28 29	17 65		
4	Wycombe	39	9	9	2	27 14	7	8	4	18 14	17 65		
5	Exeter	40	11	4	5	31 22	7	7	6	26 24	11 65		
6	Gillingham	40	11	6	3	36 18	7	5	8	18 33	3 65		
7	Shrewsbury	40	14	3	3	39 14	1	12	7	15 24	16 60		
8	Bradford	40	10	8	2	34 16	6	3	11	24 32	10 59		
9	Chesterfield	39	8	6	5	31 24	8	5	7	29 27	9 59		
10	Dag & Red	39	9	3	7	34 20	6	8	6	28 25	17 56		
11	Darlington	39	11	4	4	32 16	7	5	8	21 20	17 53		
12	Lincoln City	39	6	10	4	26 19	7	3	9	23 28	2 52		
13	Morecambe	39	7	9	4	26 19	5	7	7	19 27	-1 52		
14	Rotherham	38	9	6	4	26 15	9	5	5	27 20	18 48		
15	Aldershot	39	9	8	3	33 27	4	1	14	20 43	-17 48		
16	Acc Stanley	40	8	5	7	24 21	3	6	11	16 31	-12 44		
17	Notts County	40	6	6	8	21 24	4	8	8	24 34	-13 44		
18	Port Vale	39	6	2	11	21 31	6	3	11	19 28	-19 41		
19	Macclesfield	40	6	3	11	20 34	5	3	12	20 37	-31 39		
20	Barnet	39	5	6	8	25 32	3	7	10	22 36	-21 37		
21	Bournemouth	40	9	6	5	22 13	4	6	10	25 35	-1 34		
22	Grimsb'y	40	5	6	9	28 27	2	6	12	16 38	-21 33		
23	Chester	40	4	7	9	23 28	2	6	13	14 44	-35 30		
24	Luton	40	7	6	7	33 32	6	7	7	23 24	-4 22		

GOAL: Chris Martin pulls one back before half time. For more of last night's pictures, see inside

gaping holes at the back and United exploited that with four minutes remaining when new boy David Livermore was left defending against two forwards. The odds ran to form and substitute Mark Hudson was left an eternity to thump a shot passed Brill that, with Monty Panesar in attendance, sent Luton into a spin that could mean so much more than a defeat.

LUTON: Brill, Keane, Pilkington, Nicholls, Emanuel (Parkin, 79), Livermore, Hall, Martin, Bower, Craddock, Gallen. Subs: Davis, Henderson, Asafo-Adje, Jarvis

Referee: Darren Deadman (Peterborough)
Attendance: 5,975 (196)