

Nico admits players are 'gutted' by drop

WHAT MICK MADE OF IT



BRAVE Luton Town manager Mick Harford took relegation on the chin and vowed that with a level playing field the Hatters would bounce back next season.

Victories for Chester and Grimsby, coupled with Luton's goalless home draw with Chesterfield, saw Town relegated into the Blue Square Premier after a disappointing Kenilworth Road display.

And Harford believes their last two performances against Lincoln and the Spireites have told the story of their season.

On the Chesterfield game, he said: "The first half was awful, the two teams didn't play. They had come for the draw as usual.

"Second half there was only one team in it and we couldn't break them down. The last two games we've kept two clean sheets, but we didn't have that cutting edge today or on Saturday like we did at Wembley.

"That's been the story of the season so far. Our home form has let us down a little bit."

Harford once again praised Town's supporters and vowed they would bounce back.

He said: "They didn't deserve the shit they've had to put up with and the hassle and I thank them for their support.

"We are in it together. We will stick together and keep working for the cause. The club's never been in this position before and hopefully we can bounce back."

But Harford admitted that he and his team-mates were unaware they had been relegated as they left the field.

He added: "We found out in the dressing room and obviously it filtered through."

Luton Town 0 Chesterfield 0

DISTRAUGHT Hatters skipper Kevin Nicholls admitted he and his team-mates were left devastated after relegation became a reality at Kenilworth Road on Monday, writes Mark Wood.

With Chester and Grimsby both recording victories, this result simply wasn't good as Town dropped out of the Football League after probably the toughest season in their history.

The game against Chesterfield was a microcosm of Town's season, with the result offering a sobering parallel to last Sunday's Johnstone's Paint Trophy triumph at Wembley.

Luton spurned plenty of chances, Claude Gnaka and Sam Parkin the worst offenders, and were left frustrated by the unadventurous Spireites, who named maligned former Hatters Alan Goodall and Darren Currie on the bench.

Nicholls, 30, said: "I feel completely opposite to last Sunday. We all knew it was a tough task and we were running out of games and we needed six points out of the run of games over Easter and we got two.

"I can put my hand on my heart - there's a group of players in there that are absolutely devastated.

"Second half we could have had a few goals, but we didn't. It's been the story of our season.

"We've got four games to stay unbeaten and finish the season strong."

With Chris Martin suspended and Kevin Gallen (hamstring) and Lewis Emanuel (knee) ruled out through injury, in came Gnaka, Asa Hall and Parkin.

Keith Keane skewed a shot wide on six minutes, while Jack Lester lofted a decent chance over the bar midway through a poor first half.

A half-volley from Keane fizzed just over the visitors' bar, while the Hatters should have taken the lead on 25 minutes when Gnaka surged

through following a slip by Lloyd Kerry.

With only one defender to beat and Tom Craddock in acres of space, the Frenchman failed to spot him and by the time he did look up the chance was gone.

Luton reject Goodall almost came back to haunt his old club seconds after coming on as a 27th-minute substitute, but Dean Brill just about managed to grab his low effort at the second attempt with Peter Till lurching.

Goodall's delayed pass then put Gregor Robertson in on 31 minutes, but he fired wastefully wide when well placed.

Hall and Keane got in each other's way as they went for Nicholls' fine cross seconds later, while at the other end, Derek Niven sent a poor header over the bar after a brilliant centre from Jamie Lowry.

Both sides continued to create half chances, but in truth the Hatters failed to show the urgency and desire their perilous predicament necessitated as the two teams went in all square at the break.

A Parkin header glanced the stanchion on its way over the bar three minutes into the second half, before the Hatters should have twice scored on 61 minutes.

First Parkin sprung Chesterfield's offside trap to race on to Nicholls' fine through ball, but the big man lacked composure as he fired straight at Tommy Lee.

Seconds later Hall put Gnaka clear in the box, but a heavy touch enabled Lee to come storming out and smother at his feet.

George Pilkington denied Lester with another well-timed challenge on 63 minutes, before Hall forced a sprawling stop from Lee.

Parkin flashed a header just off target as Town turned the screw, but despite making plenty of chances, the Hatters were unable to take any of them as their tough season finally took its toll.



Pictures by Gareth Owen

OH CLAUDE: The unpredictable Frenchman overruns the ball on Monday, below, as Town's best chance of the afternoon goes begging against Chesterfield, while Asa Hall wins an aerial tussle with the Spireites' Lloyd Kerry, above

STAR HATTER George Pilkington. Solid as a rock at the back.

HATTERS RATED

- Dean Brill:** 6 - Dealt with everything thrown at him - which wasn't much.
- Claude Gnaka:** 5 - Nothing went right for last week's Wembley hero.
- Keith Keane:** 6.5 - Had a decent game and gave his all as ever.
- George Pilkington:** 7 - Some crucial interceptions and solid tackling.
- Kevin Nicholls:** 6 - Captain tried to rally his troops. Good set pieces, but mixed passing.
- Sam Parkin:** 5.5 - Missed a couple of clear chances, but struggled for long periods.
- David Livermore:** 6 - Steady performance at left-back. Didn't put a foot wrong.
- Asa Hall:** 5 - Quiet game from the attacking midfielder who never really threatened Chesterfield.
- Ed Asafu-Adjaye:** 6.5 - Another solid game from the youngster who looks a real prospect.
- Mark Bower:** 6.5 - Formed a decent partnership again with George Pilkington as Town kept a clean sheet.
- Tom Craddock:** 7 - Looked the most likely to score, but threat limited by his role out wide.
- Ian Henderson (sub):** 6.5 - Got involved when he came on and offered some width.
- Michael Spillane (sub):** 6.5 - Tried to force the issue as Town pushed for a breakthrough.

Ratings by Steve Sims



LUTON TOWN



Unused subs: Davis, Jarvis, McVeigh

CHESTERFIELD



Unused subs: Boden, Algar

Referee: Simon Hooper (Wiltshire)

Attendance: 6,494 (Chesterfield 437)

how the game unfolded

	Hatters	Spireites
Shots on target	3	2
Shots off target	11	10
Hit woodwork	0	0
Corners	12	6
Free-kicks	11	14
Offsides	2	3