

Brill-iant save makes a point

BARNET 1
Birchall 45

LUTON TOWN 1
Jarvis 49

League Two
Underhill

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LAST season's top scorer at Kenilworth Road Paul Furlong was denied a match-winner against his former club as ten-man Hatters hung on for a draw thanks to Dean Brill's superb penalty save.

The 40-year-old striker, on-loan at the Bees from Southend, was presented with an award before the game in recognition of his 200th league goal and, when Barnet were awarded a penalty, number 201 was on the horizon.

Brill had other plans and leapt to his right to palm away Furlong's 12-yard blast keeping Hatters on level terms after Rossi Jarvis had cancelled out Adam Birchall's first half goal.

"It's a guessing game," admitted Brill afterwards. "I got a bit lucky and it was a nice height. Before he took the penalty I thought 'where did he used to put them?'. I couldn't for the life of me remember as he ran up."

Luton felt justice was served after the officials took an age to decide Sol Davis had bought down Barnet winger Albert Adomah with the flimsiest of challenges in the area.

Brill pointed straight at the linesman after his grateful team-mates had mobbed him for saving the penalty and explained his disappointment at the spot kick decision.

"It was soft," said Brill. "You always look to the linesman as it was on his side and he just let the ball run out of play as if he was going to give a goal-kick."

It was a view shared by his manager: "It was never, ever, a penalty in a million years," said Mick Harford. "It was an outrageous decision made by the official. The boy fell over, he's cheated but Brill's made a fantastic save."

"It was ironic it was from Paul. They're good pals."

There was little friendship in the air in north London as this 'dead rubber' had an edge to it. The two sides had never met in a competitive match at Underhill but made a mockery of that



statistic in a fiery encounter that showed neither sets of players had an eye on their summer holidays just yet.

But one player who may have kicked his last ball of the season is Luton captain Kevin Nicholls. The tenacious midfielder is already appealing a five-match ban and did his cause no favours by picking up a second yellow with 13 minutes left.

It came from an innocuous tussle with Barnet's Yannick Bolasie which resulted with the two of them falling to the floor.

"It was nothing," fumed Harford. "The two players shook hands as they got up. There was no malice to it. There was a bit of pushing and shoving but as this stage of the season to

send someone off was absolutely outrageous."

His team-mates backed their skipper with goalscorer Jarvis saying: "I think it was petty from the referee. I didn't really see what happened from where I was on the pitch."

"Referees make good decisions and they make bad decisions... in most people's eyes that was a bad decision."

Nicholls picked up his first booking early in the first half when former Hatter Michael Leary poleaxed Asa Hall in mid-air. With Hall receiving treatment on the pitch Nicholls went over to ask what was being done and looked completely bemused when Dean Whitestone brandished a yellow card.

Other than the standard of refereeing there were plenty of indications of what Luton can expect to see next season. Long ball football from the opposition, Hatters' travelling support nearly outnumbering the home fans and a questionable pitch.

Barnet took advantage of shooting downhill when they went in front just before half time. It was no more than they deserved as Luton struggled in the sunshine and failed to pick up Gary Breen from a Bees' set-piece. The veteran defender peeled off from the pack and squeezed in a far post header that bounced off both the woodwork and Brill before falling at the feet of Birchall. The striker had the easy task of tapping into an empty net from three yards.

Harford reflected: "In the first half we didn't play particularly well and we were disappointed with the goal we



FLASHPOINT: At full stretch Dean Brill palms away Paul Furlong's penalty, left. Above, Rossi Jarvis ghosts in behind the Bees' back line to lob Luton's equaliser. Bottom left, lone striker Tom Craddock's route to goal is blocked by keeper Lee Harrison

gave away. We had a chat about it in the break – there were no harsh words. Just that we didn't really threaten them much in the first half. We had a lot of possession without really hurting them."

Whatever Harford said had the desired effect as four minutes after the restart Hatters were level with a goal that had a sense of *deja vu* about it.

Right back Michael Spillane lofted a pass over the top and, not unlike Frenchman Claude Gnaka's winning strike at Wembley, Jarvis beat the on-rushing Lee Harrison to the ball lobbing it into an open goal.

Galvanised by the early strike, Hatters took control of the second half but couldn't find a way through Barnet's well-marshalled defence.

In attack the Bees looked a spent force until they were handed the double boost of a penalty and a sending off within three minutes. But they spurned the spot kick, couldn't make their man advantage count and had to settle for a share of the spoils.

Jarvis, who operated on the right wing of Harford's experimental 4-5-1 formation, admitted the new tactics caught them cold at Barnet's infamous sloping pitch.

"We didn't get off to the best of starts and I definitely think the hill makes a difference," he said. "We struggled in the first half, we didn't play to our strengths in the new formation. We did things differently in the second half and got what we deserved."

As the season draws to a close the midfielder couldn't help but reflect on nine months of toil that has seen the club win at Wembley and lose its league status in heartbreaking fashion.

"A week before we go and win the Johnstone's Paint Trophy then we get relegated," he said. "It's hard to go from such a big high to such a low."

TEAM: Brill; Spillane (Henderson 52), Pilkington, Asafu-Adjaye, Davis; Hall, Livermore, Nicholls, Keane, Jarvis (Howells 90); Craddock (Parkin 84), Subs (not used) Roper, McVeigh.

