

Sad farewell to league football

Irrepressible Luton fans were singing: 'que sera sera, whatever will be will be...we're going to Salisbury...'

BRENTFORD 2
Osborne 73, Newton 90

LUTON TOWN 0

League Two
Griffin Park

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BY TOM LEECH

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SPORTING a black tie for the occasion, Luton boss Mick Harford was not in the mood to celebrate Brentford winning League Two.

Nine thousand Bees supporters had stayed on to see Brentford lift the title after their side won this tedious end-of-season match but there was one man who couldn't wait to get out of west London.

"I'm glad the season's over – the hard work starts here," mourned Harford as the Hatters signed off life as a league club with a disappointing defeat against the champions.

With the party in full swing behind him the man tasked with getting Luton promoted at the first attempt highlighted the battle the club will face in the Blue Square Premier.

"It's a tough league and we will have to be at our best because we'll be the big team. Everyone will want to beat Luton," he said.

"If we can keep these players together we'll have a great chance of winning it. I will work tirelessly to get Luton back where they should be which is the Football League.

"It's a horrible feeling (dropping out the league), it's horrible getting beaten. The players in that dressing room are an honest bunch of lads and will be ready for next season.

"When a club's on a downward spiral it's hard to stop it. So much has happened in the past two or three years and we've reached the bottom now. We can't go any lower. We must bounce back – it's paramount we do it as soon as possible."

After an opening which included a mini-pyrotechnic display to welcome the League Two winners onto the pitch, the game itself was a damp squib.

With no shot on target until the half-hour mark, the best action was to be found in the vocal away end. Despite relegation being a certainty from the start of the season, Luton's travelling support have never wavered. They kept spirits up with a rendition of 'que sera sera, whatever will be will be... we're going to Salisbury!' with the game seemingly destined for a bore draw.

Then on 73 minutes Brentford were awarded a free kick close to the byline. David Hunt took the set piece, floating it to the far post for substitute Kayleigh Osborne to rise highest and head past Dean Brill, sending Griffin Park into raptures.

Harford was not impressed: "Their free kick was taken in the wrong place and the big centre back's got up highest to score with a simple header.

"It's difficult to come to a place where there's a lot of excitement and euphoria around. If they hadn't scored it would have petered out to a 0-0 but we conceded from a set piece.

"That's been the story of our season – giving silly goals away. Their central pairing kept Tom Craddock and Chris



SLIM PICKINGS: Luton striker Tom Craddock was marked out of a tight game. Below, defender George Pilkington had the Hatters' best chance with this header

Martin quiet all afternoon. They were dominant and we never really got in behind them.

"There was nothing in the game in my opinion. I don't think either keeper had a lot to do."

Brentford made the scoreline more impressive when Shaun Newton scored on the counter attack in the final minute which also angered Luton.

"He (Newton) was standing about five yards offside but nowadays that's never given," said Harford. "The referee decided to forget about that, like he did from where the free kick was taken."

With six players lent to them from other teams, Bees boss Andy Scott has been busy bringing new faces to the club in their league winning year which Harford duly noted.

"Brentford used the loan market very well," he said. "When you're top of the league you can attract the better type of players to your football club."

"In all fairness to Andy he's done that in players like Billy Clarke from Ipswich and Sam Williams from Aston Villa and various other players from different clubs."

The Hatters' own loan signing Michael Spillane is returning to parent club Norwich City after his season-long spell at Kenilworth Road but will always have a place in his heart for his adopted team.

"The Brentford fans were loud but

the Luton fans were incredible," the defender said. "Especially when you think we were relegated and Brentford are champions."

"I heard our support all through the match. They were in good spirits and hopefully they'll come to the games next season and see Luton win the league."

League champions Brentford didn't outclass the division's bottom-placed team, and Spillane added: "It's a tough league so I guess they're worthy champions."

"I haven't seen a team in this division that I've thought are good enough to win the league. Obviously someone's got to and Brentford have had the results."

While the Bees leave League Two the right way and Luton exit the other, Harford reiterated the Hatters will be back at the first attempt.

"Well done to Brentford, they're deserved winners of the league. We had our day in the sun at Wembley and I've said to the players we want more days like that. We want to bounce back straight away and win the Blue Square Premier."

LUTON: Brill; Spillane, Pilkington (Roper 79), Keane, Howells; Henderson (Emanuel 62), Hall, Gallen, Livermore; Craddock (Charles 75), Martin. Subs: Davis, Parkin.

Attendance: 10,223
Referee: Graham Scott (Oxfordshire)

