

Nine man Hatters are held yet again

by Mark Wood

01582 798517 mark.wood@jpress.co.uk

**Blue Square Bet Premier
Lincoln City 1 (0)
Luton Town 1 (1)**

NINE-MAN Luton clung on for a point at Sincil Bank last night at struggling Lincoln City.

Town again threw away the lead as Danny Crow's fifth goal of the season was cancelled out by Richard Hinds' late equaliser.

Alex Lawless and Jamie Hand were then both sent off in the closing stages for two bookings, but Luton battled on for a draw as the Hatters remain unbeaten at Sincil Bank since 1966 when they famously lost 8-1.

The visitors scored the same team that lost 4-2 to Cheltenham Town in the FA Cup on Saturday, with the only change coming on the bench where Ryan Brunt returned.

A quiet opening was finally enlivened on eight minutes when a lovely passing move saw Aaron O'Connor tee up Adam Watkins on the edge of the box and the young midfielder's effort whizzed wide.

Town thought they had taken the lead seconds later when O'Connor powered his header home from Robbie Willmott's near-post corner only for the linesman to flag and indicate his delivery had drifted out.

Hatters were in the ascendancy and twice went close in a matter of seconds on 13 minutes. Watkins slipped Willmott through, but a heavy touch allowed Paul Farman to save before blocking Watkins' follow-up.

The Imps did look dangerous on the counter though and Conal Platt found Alan Power who was allowed to turn before thrashing over.

A speculative Watkins cross forced Farman to turn over the bar on 25 minutes and moments later a lovely Luton move saw Willmott feed the ball into the box and Jake Howells' exquisite dummy created

Picture by Joanna Cross



ON TARGET: Danny Crow scored

the space for Watkins to shoot, but his low drive was beaten away by the keeper.

More good play saw Alex Lawless drive down the keeper's throat, while Simon Russell's cross found Power in the box, but the midfielder could only turn the ball wide when he should have done better.

Luton deservedly took the lead with nine minutes of the half to go when Willmott's corner was deflected into the air and O'Connor did well to hold it up before flicking into the path of Crow to poke home.

Kyle Perry was lucky to escape with only a warning when he appeared to catch Dan Gleeson in the head with an elbow as he challenged for a header.

In injury time Lincoln won a corner, but Perry's drive from the edge of the box was well held by Kevin Pilkington.

Town were forced into a change at the break as Jamie Hand replaced skipper George Pilkington and Keith Keane dropped to centre-half.

O'Connor threatened from another corner in the second period, while Lincoln looked more lively going forward as the referee took a lenient attitude to a number of challenges.

Howells' purposeful run created an opening for O'Connor but he dragged just wide on 54 minutes, while Imps substitute Jamie Taylor almost punished Keane's weak clearance but his effort just beat the far post.

Josh Gowling's header dipped over the bar on the hour while Taylor thumped a header over as Lincoln threatened an equaliser.

Crow's incisive run was only thwarted by a last-ditch challenge, but it was another performance where Town typically took their foot off the gas in the second half.

Power miskicked again when well placed, while Taylor continued to make a difference and his lightning break ended with him curling wide.

The bookings started to flow as the referee's patience finally broke and when Town did get forward, Lawless could only head Watkins' cross at Farman.

But the Imps' pressure finally told with 13 minutes to go when Platt got to the byline and his dinked cross to the back post was forced home by Richard Hinds.

Town substitute Brunt was soon into the thick of it with a couple of half chances, before Town were reduced to 10 men with six minutes to go. Having already been booked for a silly attempted foul, Lawless was harshly shown a second yellow card for a push in midfield.

City almost netted a winner on 86 minutes when substitute John Sheridan cut in and it looked like former Imp Janos Kovacs had turned the ball into his own net, only for the giant Hungarian to somehow recover almost on his own goal line and come away with the ball.

Watkins crashed just wide as four minutes of stoppage time were added and substitute Francis Laurent outpaced Keane in the 93rd-minute, but shot into the side netting.

One last twist saw Hand sent off at the death as he picked up his second booking as the game ended in another frustrating draw for the