



Edinburgh: Game was too big for the referee

By Ciaran Thomas

FUMING Newport boss Justin Edinburgh accused referee Karl Evans of not being up to the job after a controversial red card sent his side spinning to defeat.

Evans sent off debutant ex-Hatter Ryan Charles in the 32nd minute for a lunge on Dan Gleeson, with Aaron O'Connor scoring the Hatters' first goal three minutes later.

"The decision changed the game and I'm not convinced that the ref got it right," said Edinburgh.

"Leading up to that, I believe he lost the game. The game was too big for him with the crowd getting on his back and I think that influenced his decision, so he's played a big part in us losing today.

"We had hit the crossbar and had a good chance, but once we went behind with 10 men it was always going to be difficult."

Luton were coming into the game on the back of successive 5-0

victories over beleaguered Kettering, but were frustrated by Newport in a tight opening with few chances.

Elliott Buchanan found space on the edge of the box but could only shoot wide for the visitors, while Alex Lawless saw a similar attempt go wide at the other end.

Charles was making his County debut after signing on loan from Cambridge. The ex-Luton man nearly gave his new club the lead, hitting the bar as the Kenilworth Road crowd began to grow restless.

However, it was to be an unhappy return for Charles as the striker was sent off just after the half hour mark.

Up against ten men for the third time in their last four games, it only took the Hatters two minutes to take advantage, as O'Connor headed in Jake Howells' corner.

Howells nearly doubled the lead in first-half stoppage time, but his shot curled wide.

Despite enjoying the majority of the possession, the hosts struggled to test Glyn Thompson in the New-



DAN THE MAN: Hatters' Danny Crow slides in to score Luton's second

PICTURE: Gareth Owen

port goal as the second half wore on, Danny Crow wasting the best chance by shooting over.

With the crowd once again getting anxious, a second goal finally came just after the hour. A quick break found Greg Taylor on the edge of the box, his low shot was heading wide but Crow was on hand at the back post to slide in for a simple finish.

With their tails up, Lawless shot wide as the hosts nearly increased their advantage immediately, while Adam Watkins shot was straight at

Thompson after a neat turn in the box.

But the victory was secured, and Sam Foley's hooked shot fell well wide late on as Newport tried in vain to hit back.

After picking up a fourth successive victory, Luton manager Gary Brabin believed Newport's tactics left them vulnerable to a sending off.

He said: "There were a few meaty challenges going in, but I'm not complaining about it. If you live by the sword, you die by it.

"There was some decent football and a lot of incident, but we've scored two good goals and were deserved winners."

With Wrexham and Fleetwood both in FA Cup action, the Hatters took advantage to close the gap at the top to eight points, with Tuesday's game against Stockport another chance to gain ground on the top two.

He said: "At the moment we can only focus on ourselves. It would be nice if we can go into Tuesday and get three more points."

MATCH STATS LUTON v NEWPORT

5	SHOTS ON TARGET	1
7	SHOTS OFF TARGET	6
2	CORNERS	1
1	OFFSIDE	0
3	FOULS CONCEDED	11
0	YELLOW CARDS	2
0	RED CARDS	1

STAR MAN: Greg Taylor (Luton)
ATT: 6,108

ENTERTAINMENT: ★★★★★

REF RATING: Karl Evans 5/10

LUTON: 4-3-3: K Pilkington 6, Gleeson 6 (Dance 40, 5), Kovacs 6, G Pilkington 6 (Willmott 80, 7), Taylor 7, Lawless 7, Keane 6, Watkins 6, O'Connor 7, Crow 6 (Fleetwood 75, 6), Howells 6. **Subs not used:** Tyler, Kissock.
Newport: 4-4-2: Thompson 6, Rodgers 5, Warren 6, Yakubu 7 (Baker 86, 5), Hughes 5, Buchanan 6 (Matthews 58, 6), Pipe 5, Foley 6, Sandell 6, Charles 4, Jarvis 5 (Harris 73, 5). **Subs not used:** Potter, Knights.