

# BUCK'S FIZZ

## Iron compound Luton misery to give

ON YOUR MARKS:  
Sean Marks celebrates  
restoring Braintree's  
lead

PICTURES: Gareth Owen



**By Sam Elliott**

**A MANAGER** appointed, charged with getting Luton back up through the play-offs? At this rate they'll be lucky to even make the play-offs.

If Paul Buckle wasn't aware of the size of the task he faced at Kenilworth Road, it was laid bare in front of him for the first time here.

Three years to the weekend that 40,000 rejoiced at Wembley as the Hatters lifted the Football League Trophy, this is now arguably the club's lowest ebb.

No-one ever said it would be easy at Braintree, but Luton could easily have lost by a five-goal margin against the part-timers. It was that bad.

Slipping to seventh with no wins in eight in all competitions, you'd better believe that if Buckle can simply get this side into the top five, it will be an achievement in itself.

Demanding trips to Albion, Gateshead and champions-elect Fleetwood on the final day of the season and with in-form Kidderminster to come at home, failure to get three points at home to Hayes tomorrow in the new boss' first game in the dug-out doesn't bear thinking about.

He may not win any popularity contests with his players, dragging them in for extra training on Easter Sunday, but Buckle told *The NLP*: "I'm hugely disappointed with the result and the performance."

"I may not have started officially but I am a massive part of the club already and it hurts. We'll get to the bottom of what's going wrong here, I need to get them on that training ground so we'll do that immediately."

"We are under-achieving and we know it. We have got a lot of hard work ahead." Braintree could have had a penalty after four minutes when Ben Wright was clattered by George Pilkington. It looked a decent shout on first viewing, but the Hatters didn't heed the warning as 30 seconds later the ball was in the back of their net.

Billy Gibson's accurate centre was too good for Adam Bailey-Dennis to resist, the marking from Luton was haphazard but the defender's header was trademark Braintree.

Going to sleep moments later at the other end wasn't. The ball broke into the path of Andre Gray after Alan Devonshire's side

### MATCH STATS

BRAINTREE v LUTON

|                    |    |
|--------------------|----|
| 8 SHOTS ON TARGET  | 4  |
| 7 SHOTS OFF TARGET | 5  |
| 5 CORNERS          | 3  |
| 2 OFFSIDE          | 2  |
| 12 FOULS CONCEDED  | 18 |
| 1 YELLOW CARDS     | 2  |
| 0 RED CARDS        | 0  |

BRAINTREE: 4-4-2: McDonald 7; O'Connor 6, Bailey-Dennis 8, Wells 7, Thomas 8, Gibson 90 (pen), Palmer 8, Reason 8, Marks 6, Wright 8 (Quinton, 87). Subs not used: Peters, Howell, Pooley, Agnew, Rubin.

LUTON: 4-3-3: Tyler 7; Osano 5, Pilkington 5, Kovacs 6, Blackett 7, Routledge 6, Peto 66, 69, Lawless 6, Fleetwood 76, 81, Kaine 6, Howells 7, Gray 7, O'Connor 6, Alukalster 80.5. Subs not used: Kissack, Wilkins.

# GOES FLAT

## new boss Buckle a sour taster

switched off, the recent signing from Hinchley was emphatic, sweeping the loose ball beyond Nathan McDonald hard and low.

Instant parity, and what a pulsating first few minutes for new boss Buckle to digest. But one big consideration for the former Bristol Rovers boss will be the form of his captain. Struggling to replicate the form of recent seasons, Pilkington's early mistakes were common place as Luton looked nervous.

There was 20 minutes on the clock when Sean Marks nodded in Reason's cross and with players and fans celebrating heartache was to follow after referee Justin Amey belatedly ruled there was a push.

Then, a second penalty appeal arrived when Asrar Thomas went down. Kenry Davis, with half-time on the

horizon, hit a rocket that smacked the post. Luton were living on their nerve.

Six minutes into the second half the visitors had a golden opportunity to go ahead. Left-back Thomas' header home to McDonald was short. Aaron O'Connor was alert to it but took a touch instead of going first time from six yards, the keeper got a

vital fingertip to it.

Devonshire's sides set pieces were a constant problem, but Luton should have known that. From Wright's free-kick Luton were undone again when Marks stole a march on flat-footed Pilkington again and cushioned his header into the bottom corner for 2-1. With stand-in bosses Alan Neilson

and Paul Garden helpless, the promotion-chasers lacked any cut and thrust after falling behind. No energy of creativity and they can unstuck again in time added on.

Braintree surged forward and Marks turned Osano in the box, the defender desperately pulled his opponent over, a clear penalty. The excellent Gibson did the rest.

Devonshire said: "That was fully deserved - 3-1 didn't flatter us at all. We should have had one or two penalties and there was absolutely nothing wrong with Sean's goal. I don't remember our keeper having much to do. "I've said it all season, we are going to score goals. I feel it is the best way to attack this league."

STAR MAN: Billy Gibson (Braintree) ATT: 1, 703

ENTERTAINMENT: \*\*\*\*\* REF RATING: Justin Amey 5/10

**"That was fully deserved - 3-1 didn't flatter us at all. I've said it all season, we will score goals, it's the best way to attack this league."**

ALAN DEVONSHIRE, Braintree manager

**"We are under-achieving and we know it. We'll get to the bottom of what's going on here. We've got a lot of hard work ahead."**

PAUL BUCKLE, Luton Manager in waiting



CONSTANT THREAT: Luton's Andre Gray goes close