



11/12 (POF)

CRYSTAL CLEAR AND IT COST US DEAR

Buckle berates 'massive injustice' over York winner

By Sam Elliott

PAUL BUCKLE says Luton Town were denied the chance to book their place back in the Football League by a lineman's flag that never came.

TV replays showed Matty Blair's winner for York City was at least a yard offside.

It's Wembley policy not to show contentious incidents on their big screen – so most Hatters fans were sitting unaware that an officiating howler had helped wreck their chances.

But Buckle knew – and was livid about the missing flag, that should have gone up once Lanre Oyeabango's long throw was nodded on by Daniel Parslow to the clearly offside Blair, who swept his shot beyond Mark Tyler.

The Hatters boss has since had a call from refs' chief Mike Riley to apologise.

But after the game he said: "If it's nip and tuck I agree with the rule that you give it to the striker. It's only fair.



"But the winning goal was so far offside it was so wrong. If the linesman is in a poor position, maybe someone is blocking his view, then OK. But it is crystal clear. It's cost us dearly and I feel a massive sense of injustice."

It had all started so well for Town. Andre Gray's composed opener less than two minutes into the final was a dream start but when Alex Lawless failed to track Ashley Chambers, the Minstermen attacker rifled home Chris Smith's fine cut-back for 1-1 on 26 minutes.

Just after half-time came the moment of controversy as Blair pounced. The England C star admitted after he knew he wasn't onside – confirmation that Luton were wronged, even though boss Buckle stopped short of saying that his side had performed well enough to win under the Arch.

"We had a great start to the game and I was delighted with how

we attacked York straight from the off," he said. "We spoke about going in front and the calmness and composure needed. York started passing the ball but we really didn't press them.

"We needed a bit of luck and they got it, not us. I don't begrudge them that, they are a good side. I congratulate them."

Equally as annoying for Buckle was York's leveller.

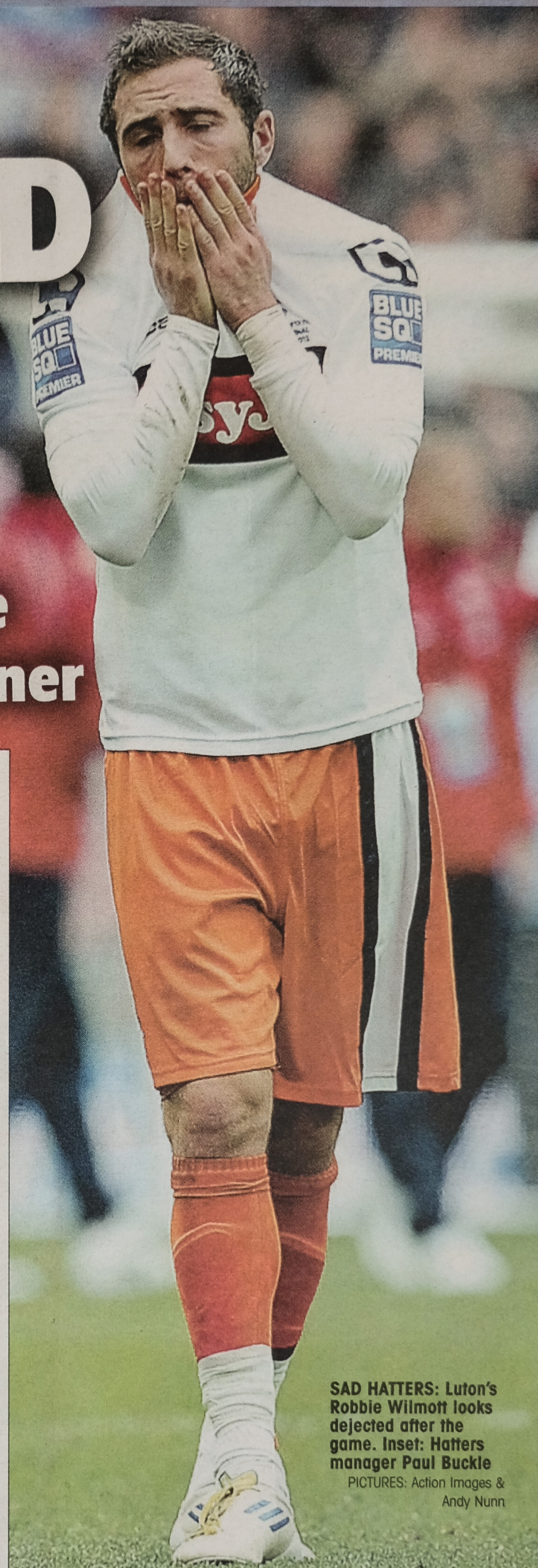
"Alex (Lawless) has lost his man," the boss said. "The first session I put on here when I arrived was keeping tight to your men and working more on set pieces.

"I got rid of one of the players because of his reluctance to take it seriously. At our level it's vital and we went to sleep. That was disappointing because Alex is a very disciplined player, he lost his man in the second phase.

"I have been honest with the players. I was pleased with their commitment levels but I refuse to pat them on the back for that. It's the least we expect."

On next season, if a total facelift is needed at Kenilworth Road, or just some fine-tuning, he won't rush in head first.

"I will take my time on that one," Buckle added. "There's always a certain energy when a new manager arrives so we'll have to see what happens."



SAD HATTERS: Luton's Robbie Wilmott looks dejected after the game. Inset: Hatters manager Paul Buckle

PICTURES: Action Images & Andy Nunn

Sweet's getting a sense of reality

By Steven Coney

LUTON TOWN managing director Gary Sweet believes the level of officiating must improve before technology is introduced to the game.

The Hatters lost 2-1 to York in the Blue Square Bet Premier play-off final after a 47th-minute winner from Matty Blair with the forward looking clearly offside when Daniel Parslow flicked on Lanre Oyeabango's long throw.

The goal was allowed to stand and the Minstermen went on to complete a Wembley double with promotion to the Football League.

"A lot of people have been talking to me about technology in games but at the end of the day, we need to have officials that are capable, responsible and accountable for their actions," Sweet said while talking on *The Non-League Show*.

"On Sunday, we had a very big game that meant £1m to us and I think you need to get the officials to match the importance of the game.

"We had fifth tier referees when we could have had a Premier League referee taking charge of a game with similar importance to a Premier League match.

"I'm sure if that had been the case, it would have been 1-1 and we'd have gone to extra-time – then it really is anyone's game."

Meanwhile, Sweet praised Hatters boss Paul Buckle despite missing out on a return to the Football League.

He said: "We definitely made the right appointment in Paul Buckle, 100 per cent.

"No disrespect to Gary Brabin, there's a lot of water gone under the bridge there and we still remain friends.

"But Paul Buckle was definitely the right appointment and he surpassed the expectations that we set out for him.

"Our priority was the longer term rebuilding of the squad."