

GRAY RAINS ON WATSON FAREWELL PARADE

12/13



SOUTHPORT 1

Clancy 2



LUTON TN 3

Robinson 30, Gray 34, 82

THE TALK at this game was all about two eras: the promise of one and the end of another.

It has been a trying season for both of these clubs, and while John Still continues to plot his long-term plan at Luton Town, the mood for Southport yesterday was one of reflection.

For eight of the past ten seasons, the manager's seat in the home dugout has been occupied by Liam Watson. Come the start of the new campaign in August, it will feel like a different place without him.

No sooner had safety been secured on Tuesday night than Watson's exit was announced, affording him a final match to say his farewells.

The journey for Southport under Watson has certainly been eventful: two Conference North titles and three scrapes with relegation, one of which ended with a reprieve.

Last season was probably his best, exceeding all expectations as Southport held their own in the upper reaches of the table. But as this campaign has progressed, things have almost felt stale, resulting in a late fight against the drop.

The next move for both manager and club will be interesting.

"The decision to step down hasn't been taken lightly," said Watson, who was given a guard of honour onto the pitch and applauded by both sets of fans.

"It has been an emotional period but I want to make a fresh start.

"I had a few offers to leave at the back end of last season but I didn't think it was right.

"This year the squad has been hit by injuries and departures. We've put our faith in

By Alan Jones

youth and the next manager will have a squad with great potential.

"It was quite nice to end against Luton because I've known John Still for a long time.

"My first Conference match was against his Dagenham & Redbridge team. Unfortunately, we lost then and we've ended up losing today"

Luton's focus has long been on next season, and with Watson's departure occupying the home crowd, the football became something of a sideshow.

Southport could not have asked for a better start, Sean Clancy heading in Chris Almond's cross, but Luton levelled when a slide-rule pass from Alex Lawless was finished by Matt Robinson.

On 34 minutes Robinson turned provider for the excellent Andre Gray who, after a series of gilt-edged Southport misses, added a late third from Lawless' pass.

"There were two tired teams out there today but we responded well to going

a goal down," reflected Still.

"It's been a long season and everyone needs a rest. I think we needed the season to end, particularly after playing a lot of games in such a short period of time.

"I'm going away tomorrow but there will be a lot of work in May. Pre-season looks a long way away but it will soon catch up with us."

Two clubs at a crossroads, two clubs with a big summer ahead.

For both Southport and Luton, preparations for next season cannot start soon enough.

MATCH STATS		
SOUTHPORT v LUTON		
2	SHOTS ON TARGET	6
4	SHOTS OFF TARGET	5
5	CORNERS	9
3	OFFSIDE	3
8	FOULS CONCEDED	11
0	YELLOW CARDS	0
0	RED CARDS	0

STAR MAN: Andre Gray (Luton)
ATT: 1,408

ENTERTAINMENT: ★★★★★

REF RATING: Wayne Barrett 7/10

SOUTHPORT: 4-4-2: Hibbert 7; Chalmers 6, Lever 7, Smith 7, Willis 6; Almond 7 (Lynch 51 6), Poku 7 (Whalley 90), Moogan 6 (Ledsham 89), Clancy 6; Owens 6, Tames 6.

Subs not used: Hedge, Parry.

LUTON TOWN: 4-2-3-1: Tyler 6; Smith 6, Goodman 7, Rowe-Turner 6 (Ainge 60 6), Griffiths 6; Taiwo 7 (Wall 77, 6), Robinson 7; Gray 8, Lawless 8, Martin 6 (Howells 60 6); Shaw 6.

Subs not used: Brill, Rendell.