

LAST-KICK GOAL HALTS CITY RUN



CONTRASTING EMOTIONS: Luton Town's Oliver Lee celebrates at full-time as his side defeat Exeter 3-2 at St James' Park, while the Grecians Tom Nichols strikes a dejected figure



PAIN AND GAIN: Clinton Morrison celebrates as Alex Nichols equalises for Exeter, taking a blow to the head in the process

EXETER City's six-game unbeaten run came to a halt after Luton did a Chelsea amid bitter controversy.

The Hatters sacked manager John Still on Thursday – the same day as Jose Mourinho was axed – following four straight defeats. But just as Chelsea's players were beating Sunderland in their first game without the Special One in charge, Luton gave Andy Awford a winning start to his job as caretaker boss.

Cameron McGeehan drew first blood from the penalty spot on the half hour before Danny Green made it 2-0 four minutes later.

But the Grecians mounted a spirited fightback in the second half and levelled thanks to goals from Tom Nichols and Alex Nicholls.

Then in the ninth minute of stoppage time – which came after a linesman had to be replaced due to injury – Paul Benson bundled the ball home despite claims Exeter keeper Bobby Olejnik had both hands on the ball.

Grecians boss Paul Tisdale would not be drawn on the moment of controversy.

He said: 'I have no view and you probably have a better view than I did. At the end of the day, the ball has ended up in the back of our net, whatever way you spin it.'

'I am more concerned about the 30 seconds that led up to that point and the

EXETER CITY	2	LUTON TOWN	3
Nichols 71, Nicholls 82		McGeehan 30 (pen)	
		Green 34, Benson 90	
Attendance: 3,777 (416)		Referee: Brendan Malone	

by Matt Bamsey at St James' Park

process that led to that goal. That's all I can look back on because the referee decides if it went in.

'The ball ended up in our net. I don't know how it ended up there but it's their winner.'

'We are all very deflated. If you judge the game by our play then there is only one winner.'

'It's very hard to take when you play as well as we did today and it bodes well for the remaining games.'

Exeter got off to a rusty start with Jordan Tillson squandering possession cheaply before bringing down Green on the edge of the box as he attempted to repair the damage.

Green picked himself up to take the free kick but only succeeded in blasting straight at the Exeter wall.

A slick Exeter move ended with Joel Grant and Nicholls swapping passes before the latter lashed an effort towards the top corner, Mark Tyler pulling off a fingertip save.

Exeter pinned Luton in their half for a spell and Jamie Reid cut inside Magnus Okuonghae but was denied a clear shooting opportunity by a crucial Alex Lawless block.

The home side continued to press and Tyler got down to gather Grant's low, skidding

drive. The Luton keeper came to the rescue again, this time plunging to his right to push a speculative Nichols long-range strike around the post.

Luton took the lead against the run of play on the half hour after they were gifted a penalty following a clumsy trip by Craig Woodman on Sean Long.

McGeehan coolly stepped up to bury the ball into the bottom corner for his ninth goal of the season.

The Hatters doubled their advantage on 34 minutes after Long clipped the ball to the back post where Green arrived to ram a deflected shot past Olejnik.

Lee Holmes did his best to pull one back but his rising drive was plucked out of the air by Tyler before Grant fluffed his lines by blazing wastefully over.

Jordan Moore-Taylor planted a header straight at Tyler and moments later the defender made a crucial block to foil McGeehan. From the resulting corner, Green picked out Benson and his bullet header flew over.

Tisdale made a double substitution on 59 minutes in an effort to crack Luton's resistance. Ollie Watkins was summoned from the bench to replace Matt Oakley and Clinton Morrison went on for Reid. Watkins was quickly in

the action but his low drive was blocked by Jake Howells as Luton retreated deeper in an effort to cling on to their lead.

A powerful run by Watkins ended with a trip by Cuthbert, presenting Exeter with a wonderful opportunity from 20 yards out. Nichols side-footed the free kick over the wall and into the roof of the net to hand Exeter a lifeline.

After a lengthy stoppage to replace an injured linesman, Tillson tried his luck from range with a fiercely-hit strike that Tyler gobbled up.

Exeter snatched an equaliser on 82 minutes after Holmes fizzed over a corner and Nicholls bravely attacked the ball with a powerful header past Tyler.

The bombardment continued and Nicholls almost found a winner with a blistering shot that was brilliantly parried by Tyler.

Moments later Nichols slid the ball into the path of Morrison and his angled shot was blocked by the keeper.

Luton broke with three against one but Olejnik came to the rescue with a save to thwart Jack Marriott before the visitors plundered a dramatic winner with the last kick of the game.

Woodman's mistake allowed Marriott to tear into the box and his cross was bundled home by Benson from close range.

● FORMER Yeovil Town frontman Kieffer Moore is still pinning his hopes on securing a contract with Exeter.

The 23-year-old wants a move back to English football after playing for Norwegian club Viking KF until the Norwegian season ended in November.

Tisdale has not decided whether to offer the 6ft 5in striker a deal but he remains training with the club.

● CITY'S trip to York City has been re-arranged for Tuesday, February 16, because the originally scheduled date collided with the weekend of Exeter's FA Cup match against Liverpool.

★ RATINGS	
Olejnik	★★★★
Davies	★★★★
Tillson	★★★★
Moore-Taylor	★★★★
Woodman	★★★★
Grant	★★★★
Oakley	★★★★
Nicholls	★★★★
Holmes	★★★★
Nichols	★★★★
Reid	★★★★
Subs: Watkins ★★★★★ (Oakley 60), Morrison ★★ (Reid 60). Subs not used: McAllister, Oyeleke, Hamon, McCready, Egan.	
Bookings: Grant 33.	
LUTON TOWN: Tyler, Long, Cuthbert, Okuonghae, Howells (Griffiths 65), Lee, Lawless, Mackail-Smith (McQuoid 72), McGeehan, Green (Marriott 90), Benson. Subs not used: Griffiths, Marriott, Justham, Guttridge, McQuoid, Musonda, Justin.	
Bookings: McGeehan 90	