

Exeter City goalkeeper Bobby Olejnik can only stare as Cameron McGeehan's penalty rolls past him; below, Oliver Lee holds off Tom Nichols

Pictures: Phil Mingo/Pinnacle



Controversial injury-time goal from Luton condemns Exeter to defeat

Exeter City 2 Luton Town 3
by Simon Larkins at St James' Park

A controversial 97th-minute goal from Paul Benson condemned Exeter City to only their second home defeat of the season.

Referee Andy Davies went down the tunnel to a chorus of "boos" and chants of "cheat" as he allowed the 36-year-old striker's goal to stand despite him appearing to have pushed City goalkeeper Bobby Olejnik into the back of the net to put the Hatters 3-2 up in second-half stoppage time.

Luton, on the back of four straight defeats, had done little to deserve the three points prior to that as City had created much the better chances throughout the 90 minutes.

The Grecians had found themselves 2-0 down at the break, but battled back to level the scores with a superb free-kick from Tom Nichols and a brave header from Alex Nicholls.

City manager Paul Tisdale was forced into two changes from the side that had won so impressively against Port Vale in the FA Cup last time out as David Wheeler and Troy Brown were ruled out through injury.

That meant Matt Oakley returned to the starting line-up in a holding midfield role, allowing Jordan Tillson to drop into the centre of defence and Tom Nichols to start up front alongside Jamie Reid.

Luton Town started the match brightly as Danny Green fired a free-kick he had won on the edge of the area straight into the Grecians defensive wall, but after that the Hatters were second best for the majority of the first half as City pushed forward and created chances.

Grant was at the heart of the action for City as he produced a couple of step-overs before having a shot deflected wide for a corner on ten minutes and then he set up Alex Nicholls with an effort at goal from eight yards out, but Mark Tyler pulled off a fantastic save.

The opportunities kept coming City's way though as Grant and Reid both had close-range shots blocked and then Tyler turned a long-range shot from Nichols around the post.

So, it was very much against the run of play when Sean Long was upended in the box by a needless challenge from Craig Woodman. Cameron McGeehan stepped up to score the penalty, sending Olejnik the wrong way.

Long was the provider of Luton's second goal as well as he worked a yard of room in City's left-back area before crossing to the back post when Green hit a half-volley past Olejnik.

A shell-socked Grecians hit back as Holmes and Woodman tested Tyler before Grant blazed a guilt-edged chance over the crossbar in the closing stages of the first half.

Jamie Reid and Nicholls both sent efforts off-target at the start of the second-half, but it was not until Ollie Watkins and Clinton Morrison were introduced to the game on the hour that City started to get back on top.

It was Watkins who won the free-kick that led to City's first goal as he went on a driving run forward before being felled on the edge of the area. Nichols stepped up to take the free-kick and curled and effort into the roof of the net.

After that City sent cross after



cross into the box and it was from their 13th corner of the game that they got the equaliser as Holmes swung a corner into the near post and Nicholls went through a crowd of players to head home.

Nicholls then almost made it 3-2 as he caught a volley sweetly that Tyler produced an instinctive save from to turn around the post.

Then a deflected Nichols shot fell to Morrison in the box, but Tyler was quickly off his line to deny the veteran striker.

Town had a counter-attack when Josh McQuoid brought a good save out of Olejnik, but going into nine minutes of added time it was City who looked the more likely to score.

It was a cruel blow when Luton scored in the final minute of stoppage time as Benson bundled the ball and Olejnik into the back of the City net.

Exeter City (4-4-2): Olejnik; Davies, Tillson, Moore-Taylor, Woodman; Nicholls, Oakley (Watkins 58), Holmes, Grant; Nichols, Reid (Morrison 58). Substitutes (not used): Hamon (gk), McAllister, Oyeleke, McCready, Egan.

Booked: Grant.

Goals: Nichols 71, Nicholls 82.

Luton Town (4-2-3-1): Tyler; Long, Cuthbert, Okuonghae, Howells (Griffiths 64); Lee, Lawless; Mackail-Smith (McQuoid 72), McGeehan, Green (Marriot 88); Benson. Substitutes (not used): Justham, Gutteridge, Justin, Musonda.

Booked: McGeehan.

Goals: McGeehan 30 pen, Green 34, Benson 90.

Referee: Brendan Malone (Wiltshire).

Attendance: 3,777.