

'A belligerent and brutal night' – and Stock issues a warning

LUTON 2
WATFORD 1

By ROGER
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AS CALM SETTLED once again over Kenilworth Road after Wednesday's battle of the Third Division giants, Town manager Alec Stock hit out at the hooligans who turned it into a night of terror on the terraces.

"You can sum it up in three words — bloody, belligerent and brutal," he said.

"If anyone thinks he can come on my ground and fool about like that, he's in for a shaker," he warned.

"Whether he's a visitor or a Luton supporter, he's had his final fling. This is the last occasion we will tolerate this sort of behaviour. Thugs will be dealt with severely," said Mr Stock.

It was almost expected that the night of the year at Kenilworth Road would boil over into violence, both on the field and in the terraces. After simmering through a first half of nerry tension Luton beat Watford in a battle of honour.

Blazed

Battle is not a bad word for it either. Three players were sent off, two from Watford and one from Luton, and countless other indiscretions on the field

called for sterner action by the referee.

While this was going on bricks and pennies were being hurled in the crowd, and more than 100 casualties were treated for injuries.

At half-time the close-packed 25,523 crowd spilled over from the Oak Road end, and the start of the second half was delayed as appeals were made to clear the battlefield for action.

Bloodied heads and stretchers round the touchline blended with some coarse kicking on the field. The first half was one of manly, rugged football between two teams fighting for their honour. The second half was one of frenzied hacking, of angry scenes, and of wild players doing things they surely regret now.

Some of Watford's tackling was the worst I have ever seen.

No comment

Said Luton manager Alec Stock afterwards: "I thought the crowd's behaviour matched that of the players — it was brutal."

Watford manager Ken Furphy walked away without commenting.

Flashpoint came early in the second half when Luton's Alan Slough, recently voted Town's

"player of the year" was sent off, along with Watford's Barry Endean. They were involved in a wrestling match and Endean ended on his backside.

I honestly don't know who started it. I saw Slough with Endean in a head mare, and the two scuffled fiercely before being separated by other players. Referee Ken Burns, of Stourbridge, booked them both and sent them packing.

And then it really started. Luton were leading by a brilliant goal taken in the first half by man of the match Ian Buxton. Welshman Tom Walley lost his composure and ran into trouble. He appeared to foul both Dougan and Rioch and afterwards the crowd booed his every move.

Five minutes from the end he was sent off after kicking Lewis.

By then Luton had gone two up when Keith Allen headed in an accurate corner from Lewis. This second goal was a signal for the fans, who had tumbled out of the terraces and had been placed round the touchline, to invade the pitch.

Pleas were made by loud-speaker, and order was restored. That was in the 70th minute.

Watford fought like demons to get back into the game. They only needed one point to be assured of the Third Division championship.

Dixie Hale slammed a drive against a post, and Stewart Scullion thumped the rebound into Luton's reeling defence. But Watford did not seem to be able to slow things down sufficiently to steady their thoughts.

At times Watford were too fast — for themselves, and often with only Scullion and Endean (before his dismissal) upfield, they had little to offer in attack. Scullion chased everything, but more often than not headed for the corner flag, where he was quickly cornered by Jack Bannister.

Watford's reward came three minutes from the end. With only nine gladiators left, Dougan upset things when he pushed a soft back pass to Tony Read. Scullion chased smartly and nipped in to smash home a good goal.

Cool Buxton

This was a signal for another set of supporters to charge like a cavalry unit down the field to shout abuse at the opposition's fans. It was a night of madness. Nobody who squeezed into the ground will ever forget it.

More about Buxton, who was playing his last match for Luton. He was the outstanding

man on the field, and one of the coolest in the heated atmosphere. Throughout the evening he kept his head, preferring to use it to beat Walter Lees in the air rather than to scheme up nastiness.

He made it a 90-minute nightmare for Lees, beating him consistently in both departments, and laying off good balls for his mates to chase. In the 29th minute he headed down to Lewis, collected a hard-fought-for return, and belted it past Walker from near the edge of the box.

In the second half he chased a Rioch pass and produced the best shot of the match, which Walker tipped over with the best save.

Afterwards Buxton said goodbye to his colleagues. He told me: "It's really been a night for me to remember. It was nice to get a goal in my last match for the club. I wish that the second one had gone in. I haven't hit a left footed volley like that for 10 years."

Mike Keen had another fine night for Luton, and was only a couple of steps behind Buxton for the man-of-the-match award. Along with him were Lewis, Allen and Slough.

Luton played the better football, but it was no night for the connoisseur. There was as much high kicking as a can-can act.

The unpleasantness started early when Rioch was heaved over in the penalty box by Hale. Luton might well have had a penalty. Then Lewis fell in a collision with Welbourne, away from the play. The referee spoke to a linesman but took no action.

French was well marshalled by Williams, but still caused trouble with his left-footed inswingers.

Read and John Moore were steadying influences as things began to get out of hand, and though on the verge of losing his head once or twice, Moore gave a steely performance.

Eddy had a good night for Watford, as did Walker in goal.

Violence in the crowd eroded into the game, which was accompanied by the sight of bodies being carried out — some hurt, some struggling. It was a night that will be remembered. A night better forgotten.

Luton Town: Read; Dougan, Bannister; Keen, Slough, Moore; French, Lewis, Buxton, Allen, Rioch. Sub: Branston.

Watford: Walker, Welbourne, Williams; Eddy, Lees, Walley; Scullion, Hale, Sinclair, Endean, Owen (Garbett).

Referee — Mr K. Burns (Stourbridge).

Attendance — 25,523.

	TOP FOUR						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Watford	45	27	10	8	74	31	64
Swindon	44	26	9	9	68	34	61
Luton	46	25	11	10	74	38	61
Bournemouth	46	21	9	16	60	45	51