

Hatton strikes for a derby double

IN VIEW of the drama that was to follow at Stamford Bridge 48 hours later, Town supporters showed considerable good judgment as they whistled loud and long to try to persuade the referee to ring down the curtain on Saturday's derby game with Watford.

The Town had shown both sides of their nature in a strange mixture of a match. At times in the first half they were brilliant and could have been three

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or four goals up. In the end they might easily have dropped another home point and done mortal damage to the promotion bid.

On balance, I thought the Town deserved to complete the double over a Watford side still struggling to get used to the Second Division after two successive promotion campaigns.

Watford are at the sort of stage the Town were experiencing a year ago, with a major shake-up in staff barely complete.

At times they looked like a bunch of individuals who still haven't got to know each other very well, and it was to their credit that they kept in the game for so long.

When the Town opened up in a first-half performance which brought an ovation at half-time, Watford looked ready to be slaughtered.

The defence looked rock solid after an early scare in which Ray Train got down Watford's left wing and sent an angled shot wide of the far post.

Alan West and Tony Grealish ran the game from midfield, and Steve Sims and Ian Bolton had a terrible time as Bob Hatton and Brian Stein tormented them on the ground.

David Moss wasted the best early chance the Town created, going through beautifully in pursuit of a through-ball from Ricky Hill. His pace took him clear, but he pulled the shot wide.

That was in the 12th minute, but three minutes later Hatton more than made amends. West broke down the left wing and from his cross Grealish tried to shoot at goal. He was half-tackled, but the ball bounced kindly for the Town and Hatton calmly notched his 16th goal of the season, his third in three matches.

Watford had to struggle as the Town showed every sign of running up a cricket score, with Mal Donaghy and Kirk Stephens pressing forward to back up attacks.

One move went the length of the field, involving Donaghy, Hatton, Stein and Moss, but Hatton headed Moss's centre over the bar, and then put a shot wide from a chance created by Donaghy and Stein.

It was one-way traffic and Eric Steele had to make the save of the match to keep out another drive by Hatton. The corner produced a frantic scramble in which Moss and Hill both had shots cleared off the line.

Significantly, Jake Findlay's only serious work in the first half was to halt a Watford break, when he raced out of his area to head clear and prevent Luther Blissett reaching a long clearance.

Inexplicably, the Town lost their smooth rhythm after the break, and referee John Martin played a part with some astonishing decisions.

Watford opened up in the search for an equaliser and Findlay had to make

a top-class save to save the day when Train put Malcolm Poskett through. Good as the save was, Poskett really should have made the chance count.

Mr Martin's incessant whistling, often for offences which only he saw, helped to provoke a little niggles as Watford tried to get back into the game. Mike Saxby was booked for obstruction on Train, while Moss and Mick Henderson got involved in a far more serious scuffle and were let off with a lecture.

Wilf Rostron also collected a booking, but Saxby's was the most serious, because it put him on 28 disciplinary points, and the next yellow card could well mean a three-match ban.

With 25 minutes to go Moss was taken off, still suffering from an ankle injury, with Mark Aizlewood going on at left back and Donaghy moving into midfield.

The Watford substitution looked like a belated admission that Saxby and Paul Price had more than matched the central thrusts of Poskett and Blissett. The lanky Ross Jenkins was put on in place of full-back Harrison, and in the end Watford went close to snatching a point.

Blissett was left unmarked to meet a cross from Rostron, but sent his header over the bar.

And the nearest thing to another goal came at the other end when Hatton still found the energy in the 88th minute to gallop down the flank and deliver another lovely cross, Stein's flying header was worth a goal, but Steele made a good save.

It turned out that the first-half supremacy had been enough to take the points, and Town boss David Pleat said: "I think we deserved it."

Watford manager Graham Taylor declined to talk to reporters, saying that while relegation was still a threat he did not want to say anything that might increase the pressure on his players.

"He probably can't think up any more excuses for losing," said one of the scribes who had followed Watford all season — Saturday was their 16th defeat in 36 matches.

WATFORD DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 1, WATFORD 0
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West, Stein, Hatton, Moss (Aizlewood 65 mins).

WATFORD: Steele; Henderson, Harrison (Jenkins 72 mins), Sims, Bolton; Patching, Booth, Train; Poskett, Blissett, Rostron.

THE GOAL: Bob Hatton, 15 minutes, his 16th of the season following a run and cross by Alan West.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town nine saved and five off target; Watford two saved and nine off target.

ATTENDANCE: 12,783—and would have been 3,000 higher if tickets had been made available for sale on the day of the game.

ENTERTAINMENT: Lovely first half, but the Town lost their poise after the break.

REFEREE: John Martin, Alton, Hants—the man who arrived at Plymouth for a 7.30 match which kicked off at 3 pm. That was Plymouth FC's fault. Having seen Mr Martin they're not so daft . . . he had an off day.

BOOKINGS: Mike Saxby for obstruction on Ray Train, which probably takes him to 28 disciplinary points; Wilf Rostron for a foul on Mal Donaghy.