

WATFORD FALL AGAIN TO THAT LUTON JINX

Watford 0 Luton 1

THE fourth derby day encounter inside 11 months once again brought Luton the narrowest of victories. But this was no special edition of any kind on a Vicarage Road night full of mediocrity.

One gem of a turn by Brian Stein to by-pass Steve Sims and Ken Jackett floored Watford. The midfielder drove hard for the right by-line, crashed over a fierce centre and Steve White rammed home the decisive 11th minute goal.

This was White's fourth of the season, two of which have now nailed the Hornets following his match-winning header at Kenilworth Road in August.

Down went Watford to their second home defeat as they failed to score for only the fourth time in 23 League and Cup outings... further proof that Luton apply some form of jinx.

It could have been different had new signing Les Taylor converted a great 55th-minute opening after the substitute had first set up Ross Jenkins for a shot.

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The ball rebounded to Malcolm Poskett who looked to have made the equaliser for Taylor. But Watford's agony continued as he snatched at a close range effort too early.

So Luton, with recalled Mike Saxby and fit again 'keeper Jake Findlay clearing or catching every misdirected high ball Watford chose to fire at them, survived and deservedly took both points.

They lived dangerously moments before that when the bubbling Taylor met Jackett's through ball to bravely challenge the advancing Findlay. David Moss was back to mop up that threat, while Paddy Grealish had been on the line to kick Nigel Callaghan's second-minute drive to safety as well.

A free-flowing opening period promised high entertainment value before



It's an up and under as Watford and Luton players compete for a high ball

White's goal deadened the tempo. Ricky Hill forced an early save from Eric Steele after beating Luther Blissett, while Findlay had to deny Jackett.

Luton used winger David Moss in a fluid role just behind the front line of White and Stein and his largely midfield role cut out one of the game's exciting options.

Another was the visitors' offside trap, which Watford fell foul of to the crowd's annoyance. Just as frustrating was the Hornets total lack of vision which prevented them from opening up Saxby and co before the break.

The introduction of Taylor for Callaghan at half-time added spice to the occasion and his first few touches were highly eventful. A tenacious player of the battling variety, he first put a Wilf

Rostron cross over before those near misses cropped up.

A second half flurry saw Blissett emulate Stein's crucial run from a Jenkins pass, only Poskett was unable to find the net from a cannon-like centre.

That was in the 55th minute and there the Hornets' case virtually rested. Luton, very shy visitors but with Moss back on the wing after half-time more likely to create openings, put together a neat 76th-minute move.

Safety

Moss, Grealish and Hill combined before Moss popped up again to slam a 20-yard effort just wide. Then Steele did superbly to deny Saxby, who slammed in a shot after a Moss free kick had been charged down.

Later, Jackett beat out a Stein effort after Moss once more had created the danger and, with time running out, Steele palmed a curling Moss opportunist shot to safety, the result of Kirk Stephens and Town substitute Alan West combining.

High hopes of a last-ditch Watford reply went when Jackett's high velocity free kick failed to nosedive enough to trouble Findlay and the home side were left to dwell on exactly why their penalty area involvement was largely due to luck more than judgment.

Moss's midfield presence didn't help their cause, giving even less space for Ray Train and Wilf Rostron to make an impression. It was only when Taylor emerged to inject an energy thrust things started moving.



Luton's Tony Grealish heads clear a dangerous cross

THE MATCH DETAILS

WATFORD: Steele, Henderson, Harrison, Blissett, Sims, Jackett, Callaghan, Poskett, Jenkins, Train, Rostron. Sub: Taylor (for Callaghan, 46).

LUTON: Findlay, Stephens, Donaghy, Grealish, Saxby, Price, Hill, Stein, White, Aizlewood, Moss. Sub: West (for Aizlewood, 55).

REFEREE: Mr Alex Hamil (Wolverhampton).

GOAL: White (11).

ATTENDANCE: 16,939.

Anyone making their debut is hell bent on creating an early niche for themselves at a new club, so his introduction gave the right tonic to the Watford troops.

Mick Henderson, who along with Sims enjoyed a fine match, was not put out by working with a largely un-

known quantity on the right.

Luton's decision to rest on their laurels after gaining the upper hand was justified through the end result. But it is significant that apart from Moss's ability to produce the unorthodox, their best effort other than the goal came from a defender.