

CHALLENGERS GET A LESSON IN STYLE



● **GOLDEN GOAL:** Brian Stein is perfectly poised and balanced as he cracks in the Town's 50th league goal of the season, with Watford defender Steve Terry too late to prevent the equaliser

20-2-82 3499

Match Details

WATFORD 1 LUTON TOWN 1

Half-time: 1-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Antic, not used.

WATFORD: Sherwood; Rice, Terry, Bolton, Rostron; Taylor, Blisset, (Armstrong, 49 mins), Lohman; Callaghan, Jenkins, Barnes.

THE GOALS: Wilf Rostron for Watford, 8 minutes, curling angled shot into top corner from 25 yards; Brian Stein for the Town, 33 minutes, low shot after turning Steve Terry inside out in the penalty area.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town ten saved or blocked, three wide, one hit the post; Watford six saved, two wide. Corners: 9-8 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 22,580—5,000 higher than Watford's previous biggest for a league game this season, and boosted by a big following from Luton.

REFEREE: Keith Hackett, Sheffield—did the cup final last year, and handled the game well at Vicarage Road.

BOOKING: Steve Terry for a foul on Stein, whose skill tormented him for most of the afternoon.

ENTERTAINMENT: Fascinating contest between contrasting styles, with the quality of football in the first half particularly worthy of the First Division, where both clubs should be next season.

Rivals fail to close the gap

WITH leading rivals failing to take maximum advantage of the draw between the Second Division's top dogs, the Town's run of 17 league games with only one defeat leaves them poised to make Graham Taylor's worst fears come true.

With two games in hand of Watford, and five over third-placed Oldham, the Town have effectively given the rest of the promotion contenders only two places to compete for.

Oldham, who come to Kenilworth Road this week, battled to a 0-0 draw at Cambridge, against the side who visit Luton on Tuesday.

That kept them in third place, and Blackburn missed a chance to close the gap by losing 0-1 at Leicester.

Any team capable of a consistent winning run can still upset all the odds, as Rotherham are proving.

On January 30 they lost on their own ground to Watford. But since then they have won seven consecutive games and that run has taken them from the relegation zone—they were 20th after the Watford defeat—on to the fringe of the promotion fight.

FIGHT FOR PROMOTION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town ...	23	15	5	3	50	25	50
Watford	25	13	7	5	41	27	46
Oldham	28	12	10	6	38	28	46
Blackburn ...	28	11	9	8	32	26	42
Rotherham ...	27	13	3	11	39	34	42
Sheff Wed ...	26	12	6	8	35	35	42
QPR	26	12	5	9	33	23	41
Barnsley ...	25	11	6	8	30	24	39
● Not including last night's matches.							

WITH TWO consecutive home games to be played in the next five days, Luton Town's draw at Watford in an intriguing local derby has set the stage for what should be a comfortable run to promotion.

The league table says that Watford are currently the second best team in the Second Division, and the only quibble Town supporters might have after the game at Vicarage Road is that the difference in class between the sides was not confirmed by the result.

It was mutual admiration from the best two managers in the division at a cheerful Press conference after the match. Graham Taylor of Watford was enjoying the first point he has ever seen his team take off Luton.

DELIGHTED

David Pleat was delighted with the draw, presumably because, like many of us who follow the town, he had figured that Watford would never have a better chance of ending a sequence of five consecutive defeats in derby games.

I shared that feeling, but if Luton Town are to be judged as First Division survivors next season, performances like the one they produced at Watford must be turned into three points, not one.

In terms of skill, talent and football invention the Town were a class above Watford. They created twice as many scoring opportunities as the home side and for nearly all the match looked the better all-round team.

DETERMINED

Watford's only period of ascendancy was the first quarter of an hour. They looked sharp and enthusiastic, very determined in the tackle and full of willing and hard running.

They had the boost of a brilliantly-taken goal after eight minutes. Kirk Stephens blocked an attack down Watford's left, but the ball ran free to Wilf Rostron, and he curled an amazing shot past Jake Findlay into the top corner of the net, just inside the far post.

In previous years that sort of early reverse might have finished the Town, but they have shown a remarkable resilience in this campaign, and Watford's early fire was dampened as the Town started to turn on the style.

Where Watford relied on

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

quick, long passes, giving their attackers no more than an even chance of winning possession where it mattered, the Town made progress with short passes, with midfield men supporting defence and attack in turn.

Brian Stein looked the most complete footballer on the field, but every single Town player buckled down to do a difficult job. They blunted Watford's very basic style, then showed the home side how football can be turned into a real spectacle of skill and talent.

Three times Stein took passes in the penalty area and left markers stranded by his ball control as the Town fought back from the early reverse.

EQUALISER

One shot was flipped over the bar by Steve Sherwood, the second was blocked by a defender, and the third brought the equaliser the Town deserved.

A free-kick from Brian Horton was pushed forward by Stephens, and Stein left Steve Terry floundering before placing his shot wide of Sherwood into the net.

I suspect that Watford decided from that moment that they would do well to get a draw against a side which looked capable of great things.

STRUGGLED

Ian Bolton and Terry struggled continually in the centre of Watford's defence against Stein and Steve White, while the unfortunate Ross Jenkins at the other end was allowed little service or space as Mal Donaghy and Clive Goodyear closed up that route to goal.

And Watford had no-one to match the driving midfield force of Ricky Hill, who almost gave the Town a second goal in the 38th minute. David Moss stretched Watford wide several times, and after a mistake by Pat Rice he delivered an inviting centre to the far post. Hill had to stretch high to make contact, but his header hit the post and was cleared.

Sherwood had to produce another quality save to turn a shot by Stein round the post to keep Watford level at half-time, and the Town went off the boil a little in the second half.

FRENZY

Watford produced a lot of hustle, and their work-rate reached frenzy proportions at times, but the Town had no weak links despite being forced to defend their 18-yard area for long spells.

Findlay was threatened only once, when Jenkins headed the ball down into a crowd of players and Ian Lohman had half a chance. The goalkeeper spread himself to save as the Dutchman snatched hurriedly at his shot.

Greater danger threatened at the other end, in a second-half pattern which was entirely to the Town's liking. Watford were drawn forward, then caught flat-footed as the Town launched speedy and incisive counter-attacks.

Three of the breaks were superb in everything but finish, with White having two angled drives saved and Moss suffering the same fate.

Add those to the Hill header which hit the post in the first half, and it was little surprise to hear the Watford manager saying after the game that he was happy with a draw.