

SPORTS NEWS 1

NOW FOR THE TITLE!

Town Match Verdict ★★★★★



● **ON OUR WAY:** The Top Hatters begin celebrations as Ricky Hill, second from left, turns away after regaining the lead against Shrewsbury, 12 minutes from time.

THE HAPPIEST footballers in Britain go to Chelsea on Saturday as a First Division team. The Second Division championship is the only ambition left for them this season after promotion was clinched in front of their own cheering supporters against Shrewsbury at Kenilworth Road.

On an emotional night three goals in the last 12 minutes blew away the tension on and off the pitch to set up a champagne celebration. Even chairman Denis Mortimer reached for a glass to break a six-month spell of soccer temperance.

He hadn't touched a drop since Wrexham came to Kenilworth Road and snatched a 2-0 League Cup victory in October.

That setback fades into obscurity today as the club and supporters savour the heady delights of knowing that next season the Hatters are back in the First Division.

Not one man at Kenilworth Road is frightened of the prospect, and if promotion means that the real hard work is only just beginning Friday night was not the time to worry about it.

Instead supporters shared the exhilaration of seeing ambition achieved after two seasons of near-misses. The joy also swamped the worries that cropped up as a poor Shrewsbury side, desperate for points to escape relegation, threatened to fight their way to a draw.

They showed little attacking talent, yet the Town struggled for a long time to get a grip in midfield, and the bonus of an early goal was lost when Shrewsbury's first real attack, in the 60th minute, produced a cracking equaliser.

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

Brian Stein, always too much of a handful for a lumbering Shrewsbury defence, seemed to have settled everyone's nerves when he scored in the 14th minute. The build-up was basic — a Jake Findlay clearance, an attempted back-header to his own keeper by Colin Griffin, and a quicksilver reaction and shot by Stein.

Chances to increase the lead slipped by, with some lost through bad luck, others by bad shooting, and some through good saves by Wardle, notably against Clive Goodyear, Steve White and Stein.

The Town's midfield was below its best, with Lil Fuccillo admitting that he had a personal nightmare. It approached its end when he gave the ball away to David Tong just inside the Town's half, and Tong's long diagonal ball forward was met with a tremendous volley by Ian Atkins for a goal that had to be admired.

That was in the 60th minute, and five minutes

later the luckless Fuccillo, normally so reliable, was spared further misery. Raddy Antic replaced him, and the improvement was immediate.

Ricky Hill flourished again and Shrewsbury wilted as pressure increased on their creaking rear-guard.

Nervousness and over-anxiety threatened to thwart the Town until Hill hammered the most important goal of the season to put them ahead again. A deep corner by Moss was headed back across goal by Mal Donaghy, and Hill's lethal finishing did the rest.

It was the moment Shrewsbury knew they were beaten and 14,000 happy Luton fans finally knew nothing could stop promotion.

In the 12 minutes after Hill's goal we at last saw the sort of inventive and incisive football that has been the foundation of this season's success.

David Moss and Steve White, both subjects of some critical treatment from the terraces until then, put the glittering final touches to finish off Shrewsbury.

White snapped his 18th goal of the season in the 80th minute from an opening created by Moss's through-pass, and two minutes from time White returned the compliment for Moss to go at the defence on a solo run and complete it with a goal from an angle that baffled Wardle.

The final message from a very happy party that went on into the early hours was a determination all round to get back to work in the last four matches and clinch the championship as well.

As Mr Mortimer said: "I'd be very sad if Watford were to take that off us now."

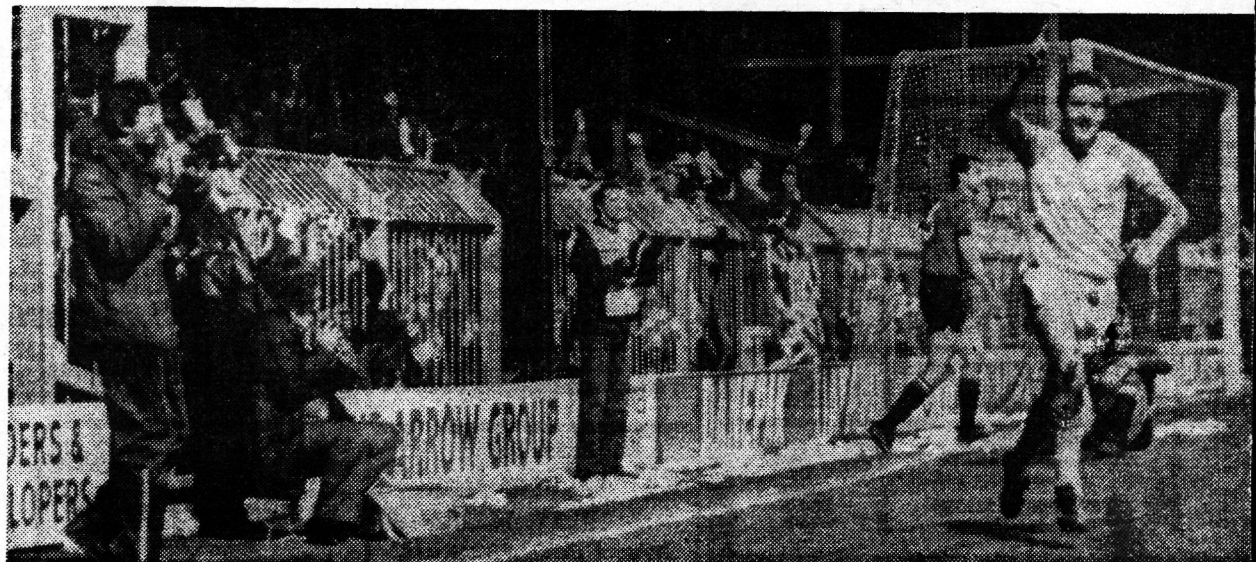
They won't!



● **BREAKTHROUGH:** Brian Stein lobs goalkeeper Bob Wardle to put the Town ahead in the 14th minute with his 17th goal of the season.



● **ALL WHITE NOW:** Wardle dives despairingly in a vain attempt to stop Steve White, on the left, making promotion a formality with his 18th goal of the season, ten minutes from time.



● **PERFECT FINISH:** David Moss wheels away as the Town and their fans celebrate his marvellous 30 goal, to make it 4-1 with two minutes to go.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 4 SHREWSBURY 1
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Findlay, Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money, Hill, Horton, Fuccillo (Antic, 65 mins); Stein, White, Moss.

SHREWSBURY: Wardle; MacLaren, Griffin, Keay, Johnson (Petts 85 mins); Turner, McNally, Tong, Bates; Atkins, Cross.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein, 14 minutes; Ian Atkins for Shrewsbury, 60 minutes; Ricky Hill, 78 mins, Steve White 80 mins, David Moss 88 mins.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved and nine off target; Shrewsbury four blocked and six wide. Corners: 9-4 to the Town.

ENTERTAINMENT: Nerves and tension threatened to spoil the party, but three goals in the last 12 minutes set up a night to remember as promotion was ensured.

ATTENDANCE: 14,563—and as hardly any came from Shrewsbury, that figure is perhaps one the Town might realistically consider as its average potential support locally.

REFEREE: Brian Hill, Wellingborough—seemed to enjoy the occasion as much as the players.