

NO CLASSIC, BUT DERBY TALENT COUNTS



● **OPENER:** Brian Stein darts goal-side of his marker to put the Town ahead 74 seconds after kick-off.

FACING a relegation battle after the heroic exploits of last season, Watford manager Graham Taylor is this week having to take a dose of the unpalatable medicine David Pleat had to swallow last season.

Frank Bunn's late winner settled a derby game marked more by endeavour and effort than by skill and talent. Taylor complained that Watford didn't deserve to lose, but that was less than fair on the Town.

Watford will never give up a game or a season without a fight. They showed every sign of being prepared to run until they dropped. But they didn't have the little touch of quality and talent that made the difference at Vicarage Road.

COOL CONTROL AND PATIENCE

The sum total of Watford's honest toil was that they prevented the Town from playing the expressive and flowing football that can destroy teams. But once the Town had settled down to play with cool control and patience, it was clear that Watford were not going to be winners.

If the Town failed to hit the heights, the truth was that they didn't need to.

Most of the entertainment came in the first half, with things very nearly working out to the plans laid by the Town. They had reverted to the old reliable formation, with Brian Horton and Bunn returning to midfield after injury and Wayne Turner at left-back again.

Paul Elliott and Mal Donaghy resumed their central defence partnership, and were helped considerably by the

fact that Watford have replaced Luther Blissett by the cumbersome George Reilly.

As a team Watford were not the strong opposition we are used to seeing.

Their deafness was caught standing and watching when the Town snapped into the lead after only 74 seconds. Paul Walsh dribbled down the left wing and passed to Stein, who was unmarked seven or eight yards from goal. He punished that slackness with a careful low shot into the net.

Watford tried to produce their traditional bombardment to keep the Town's defence busy, but while they pressed forward often enough they showed none of the composure they needed.

Horton and Bunn were both much closer to goals when the Town broke forward with accurate passing, and perhaps if Walsh would settle for beating two men and then passing instead of looking for a third and fourth victim the result would have been much more decisive.

Watford equalised when debut full-back Peter Bardsley atoned for his first-minute slackness by attacking down the right wing and sending a cross to beyond the far post.

Reilly, in front of goal, was being policed well enough, but Nigel Callaghan was left clear as the ball went over the top to him, and his looping header back across goal dropped into the net.

John Barnes and Callaghan probably deserved better support in Watford's attack, and Barnes was let down when he beat Kirk Stephens three minutes before the interval and delivered a perfect cross which Maurice Johnston headed against the bar.

If that had been a goal we might have had a cracking second half. Instead Watford seemed to realise that they couldn't win, and that a draw was worth saving.

SOAKED UP THE PRESSURE

The Town showed much more control in playing the ball out of defence. They soaked up stereotyped Watford pressure with some ease, and looked much sharper when they broke forward.

Ricky Hill joined Stein and Walsh in a battle of individual skill and confidence against dour teamwork. It was stalemate for a long time, with Watford having a let-off in the 62nd minute.

Stein got round the defence down the Town's left wing, thumped a hard low cross into the goal area and Elliott, throwing himself feet first at the ball, stabbed a close-range effort against a post.

Turner had to head a bending shot by Callaghan off the line at the other end, but that was the only second-half occasion when Les Sealey was in the slightest danger.

The winner, six minutes from time, was an illustration of the differences between the sides. Watford were mesmerised as Stein and Walsh worked the ball down the right wing.

Stein's shot from Walsh's return pass rebounded into the air, and Bunn capped his return with a thundering low shot from the edge of the penalty area which left Sherwood helpless.

REPORTS
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Match Details

WATFORD 1 LUTON TOWN 2

Half-time: 1-1

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Donaghy, Turner; Hill, Horton, Bunn; Stein, Aylott, Walsh. Sub: Antic, not needed.

WATFORD: Sherwood; Bardsley, Sims, Franklin, Price; Jobson, Rostron, Callaghan; Barnes, Reilly, Johnston. Sub: Porter, not used.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein for the Town, 74 seconds, low shot from Paul Walsh's short cross; Nigel Callaghan for Watford, 31 minutes, looping far post header from Bardsley's cross; Frank Bunn for the Town, 84 minutes, low drive after attack by Stein and Walsh was beaten off to the edge of the penalty area.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town six saved, eight wide and one hit a post; Watford five saved, eight wide, one hit the bar. Corners: 11-2 to Watford.

ATTENDANCE: 17,791, second highest league gate of the season so far at Vicarage Road, but more than 2,000 down on last season's derby.

REFEREE: Dennis Hedges, Oxford—pleased no-one from either side with some very peculiar decisions. Even his linesmen were seen to take different views of several incidents.

ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good first half, but too dour in the second. The Town didn't hit top form. They didn't need to.