

SPORT AND MOTORING



● **FIRST OF FIVE:** Emeka Nwajiobi puts the Town ahead at Kenilworth Road, with his second goal in two appearances. He was sub at Vicarage Road on Tuesday night and played a further 55 minutes as a replacement for Frank Bunn.

Appetising starter in the mud

NEITHER manager had any complaints when Saturday's first meeting at Kenilworth Road ended in a 2-2 draw. But Watford should have been grateful for the second chance.

They had fought back from two down to be level at the interval, but were under pressure for most of the second half and only a bad miss by Paul Walsh let them off the hook.

One of the lowest local derby attendances for years was treated to an old-fashioned rousing cup-tie, fought at cracking pace.

Steve Sherwood was much busier than Les Sealey, three deflections into the net ensured excitement, and in the final five minutes Watford nearly snatched victory when a drive by Nigel Callaghan hit the top of the bar and went into the crowd.

The spice of controversy was added to an appetising dish when Kirk Stephens, having given away a penalty, floored Mo Johnston with an elbow in an off-the-ball incident.

Both camps were insistent afterwards that it was not malicious, and Johnston had no complaints. Even so, if referee Alan Gunn, who had a good game, had seen it, I have little doubt the Luton defender would have been sent off.

With the sides so evenly matched as the game flowed from end to end, that would have been a pity for everyone, including the fans.

Watford had looked ominously busy and dangerous in the first few minutes, with Mal Donaghy clearing off the line from Callaghan after Sealey had been by-passed by a cross shot.

Sealey may have been at fault in that incident, but he was magnificent shortly afterwards when George Reilly delivered a vicious curling and dipping hook shot.

The goalkeeper brilliantly tipped it round the far post, and from the corner the Town mounted an incisive break. Walsh led it at speed, taking the ball 50 yards before releasing it for Emeka Nwajiobi to try his luck from 20 yards.

A deflection off David Bardsley left Sherwood isolated as the ball hit the net, and eight minutes later another move instigated by Walsh gave Stein the chance to try a shot. Sims got the deflection this time, and once more Sherwood was left helpless.

Within two minutes Watford were back in the hunt when John Barnes struck a 25-yard free kick which took a deflection off Brian Horton past Sealey.

Stephens made two mistakes to pave the way for the equaliser. His first gave the ball away to Johnston. The second was an

attempt to rectify matters as Barnes was put down the left wing. Stephens chased back and tripped the winger, and Johnston scored from the penalty.

There were times in the second half when the Town's surging attacking looked unstoppable, but Sherwood was in marvellous form and well covered by a defence which seemed quite grateful to hear the final whistle.

MATCH DETAILS

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Donaghy, Thomas, Hill, Horton, Bunn, Stein, Walsh, Nwajiobi (Antic, 73 minutes).

WATFORD: Sherwood; Bardsley, Sims, Franklin, Rostrom, Taylor, Jackott, Callaghan, Barnes; Reilly, Johnston. Sub: Sinnott, not used.

THE GOALS: Emeka Nwajiobi and Brian Stein for the Town, 18 and 27 minutes; John Barnes and Mo Johnston (pen) for Watford, 29 and 38 minutes. Other strikes: Town nine saved and 11 wide; Watford nine saved, four wide, one hit the top of the bar. Corners: 8-7 to Watford.

ATTENDANCE: 15,007 — poor for a local derby, but well up on the Town's recent average for league fixtures. Some of the absentees must be making a point about Milton Keynes.

REFEREE: Alan Gunn, Burgess Hill. Kept it going very well, and without a single booking.

ENTERTAINMENT: Classical cup-tie, full of fast and positive action from both sides.