

So costly as Hornets end bogey

GRAHAM TAYLOR summarised the feelings of Watford and their fans when he exclaimed bitterly after Saturday's match: "I never thought I would come here, win and feel sick."

Despite the disparate currents, Watford overcame all to cahlk up their first victory at Kenilworth Road since Boxing Day 1964 after holding on to the most significant part of their first-half lead.

Luton manager David Pleat later commented that he could not remember Luton having so much of the play in a local derby, but he was presumably referring to the second half. Watford indeed deserved the margin of their first-half ascendancy, creating chances at a ratio of five to the Hatters' two.

The home side piled on the pressure after the break and were well on top between the penalty areas but Watford's young back four of Bardsley, Terry, Sinnott and Price (average age 20; experience limited) coped well. Much of Luton's second half predominance was restricted to goal attempts from some distance, while they seldom worked their way behind the Watford rearguard. Even so they should have at the least worked Sherwood far more. Instead he had an easier afternoon than did Sealey.

However Luton could argue that they created second half chances at a ratio of five to two and a draw could indeed have been a fairer result. Yet seldom has fairness come into the share of points in recent derby games, so Watford can be satisfied in pulling one over Luton, if that was the case.

Luton's main claim to the points was based on two penalty appeals, both of which were turned down. "A penalty is a penalty. You cannot play the advantage rule in the penalty area. They were definite penalties," said Pleat and certainly they were close calls as far as Watford were concerned.



If the sendings off, the penalties and the rarity of Watford's success at Luton were not enough, there were also the injuries. Elliott sustained a dislocated shoulder; David Moss a broken collar bone and John Barnes a hamstring strain. Having already been without the usual combatants of Sims, Jackett, Reilly, Hill and Donaghy, neither team was at full strength to start with and Watford were the more weakened of the two.

For the Hornets, the success of the young defence was heartening, while the display given by Worrell Sterling was even more promising. He has had a disappointing time this season, battling to overcome a basic lack of confidence but once again appears to be ending a season suggesting that he could become a force. Thrown into the action where all hands had to man the pumps, his hand was the most noticeable and he emerged from the afternoon with great credit.

Paul Atkinson looked more the part as well, while Nigel Callaghan and Mo Johnston, neither of whom have been on their game of late, showed signs of a return to top form.

Kicking down the slope, Watford were impressive in the opening exchanges. Barnes lost and then regained the ball off Stephens but, as he moved into the penalty area, he hit the chance wide in Watford's first penetrating attack. Then the striker was just robbed of a good chance by a superb interception from Goodyear, who swept the ball away after Callaghan had nodded Sinnott's free kick down into Barnes' path.

Next Taylor, collecting the ball from a half-cleared corner, sent a fine, measured, dipping shot over Sealey — the ball striking the angle of post and bar and being scrambled clear.

Elliott, attacking the ball well, sent in a fierce header from a corner but found Sherwood well-positioned to collect, but a couple of minutes later Barnes limped off leaving Watford with a still further reduced average age and a further blow to their hopes of ending a run of Division One games without a win.

Yet in the 19th minute, Watford took the lead. Sinnott threw the ball in and it was knocked out to Johnston who totally mishit his shot from a good position. Drilling the ball into the ground, he still managed to send it goalwards but Callaghan nipped in to nod it out of the reach of the covering Sealey.

After 28 minutes, Luton looked certain to score. Stein raced through unmarked with Taylor in pursuit as the striker slowed on approaching Sherwood. Taylor stuck out a foot. Did he stumble or was he nudged? Stein kept his feet, chased after the ball, which had run away from him, and screwed a shot wide while

Luton1
Walsh 84
Watford2
Callaghan 19, **Johnston** 45

LUTON: Sealey, Stephens, Thomas, Horton, Elliott, Goodyear, Parker, Stein, Walsh, Bunn, Moss. Substitute: Antic for Moss after 59 minutes.
WATFORD: Sherwood, Bardsley, Terry, Sinnott, Price, Taylor, Roston, Callaghan, Johnston, Barnes, Atkinson. Substitute: Sterling for Barnes after 16 minutes.
Referee: R. G. Milford (Bristol). Attendance: 12,594.
Free kicks: Watford 19, Luton 19.
Corners: Watford 7, Luton 7.
Goal attempts on target (off target): Watford 6(9), Luton 9(13).
Watford goal attempts by: Johnston 6, Callaghan 3, Taylor 3, Barnes 1, Sterling 1, Sinnott 1.
Bookings: Elliott for foul on Terry (22 minutes), Walsh for dissent (89 minutes), Roston and Elliott for colliding (violent conduct) (41 minutes).

Luton fans bayed for a penalty.

The incident raised Luton who forged forward with a lot more conviction than they had previously shown and hesitation on the part of Price let in Walsh for what proved to be an unproductive break.

Bardsley made a fine tackle on Stein to deflect a shot for a corner from which Goodyear hooked over on the turn. Then Taylor shot wide at the other end from a useful position.

In the 34th minute Callaghan sent in a free kick from which Johnston's header was deflected wide.

Then as the interval approached Watford increased their lead. Bardsley made a great tackle on the right, sweeping the

ball away and Callaghan gathered and sped down the flank. Spotting Sterling free on the left, Callaghan curled the ball towards the youngster who in turn, spotting that Johnston was now unmarked, slipped it into the path of the leading scorer who promptly dispatched it past Sealey into the net, unchallenged.

"That was a lovely goal," admitted Pleat.

Luton opened the second half with a good effort from Bunn who sent in a curling shot from 25 yards out but Sherwood collected with ease. Bunn clubbed the ball wide from a Walsh pass.

Walsh then cut inside and fired wide before putting in two efforts in as many seconds when his first was

blocked and then cleared the bar with an overhead kick to the rebound.

Between those incidents, Johnston had a shot saved by Sealey and a free kick by Sinnott struck Johnston's back and looped just over the angle of bar and post.

Moss shot just wide; Callaghan fired over on the turn and Johnston, put through wide on the right by Atkinson, appeared to shoot prematurely with only Sealey to beat and the chance was lost.

A tackle on Thomas by Sinnott looked suspiciously like a penalty bit no whistle blew and Bunn shot the loose ball goalwards only to see it blocked.

Walsh headed just over and had another effort tipped wide by Sherwood; Bunn had two successive shots which came to nothing and Parker, breaking down the left, drove wide.

Ironically Luton's breakthrough was a trifle fortuitous but nevertheless deserved. Terry cleared the ball firmly but it struck Atkinson's back and rebounded, with the aid of a touch by Stein, into the path of Walsh who finished with finality.

All was set for a grandstand finish but while Watford were put under great pressure, it was the visitors who had the last chance. Sterling, dominant on the left, cut in and crossed for Johnston to rise and head just over the angle.

Watford had won, but for the injustice of Roston's punishment hung over the afternoon like a pall.



Mo Johnston mishits the ball down into the ground but Nigel Callaghan (7) is already moving to meet the upward bounce and flick the ball into the net (below).

