



Luther Blissett fires in Watford's second to put the Hornets 2-1 ahead.

Blissett and Reilly the only plus factor

LUTHER BLISSETT and George Reilly showed enough in their first three-quarters of an hour's striking partnership in First Division football to suggest they can become something to be feared providing they receive the service.

This was aptly demonstrated in the first half of a Jekyll and Hyde performance at Kenilworth Road on Saturday. The second half underlined that which we all know — strikers cannot function without service.

Watford's woeful second-half performance left manager Graham Taylor virtually speechless and grateful for the fact that he had already agreed with Luton boss David Pleat not to appear at the Press conference.

"When I went off at the interval, there was no hint of the second-half performance to come," said Taylor. "We gave them goals — two goals. I can only presume that having given them two goals, we were a little more concerned about our game than had the score been 0-0 at half time.

"Instead of drawing strength from the fact that we had twice led with the wind against us and looking forward to having the wind in our favour, there was a complete reversal.



"I was too lost for words to talk to anybody after the game. We were so ragged it was unbelievable."

Taylor also cited the Reilly-Blissett partnership as the only positive fact to emerge from Watford's display. "Reilly's first-half display was a consolation and his link up with Blissett showed promise," said the Watford boss.

Certainly, as Taylor summarised, there seemed no cause for concern when the interval came with the score at 2-2. Watford had shared the first half and, although Luton looked the more fluent side in that first period, the visitors had appeared the more penetrating. Hesitation on the part of Richard Jobson and

Luton3
Bunn 21, 29, Elliott 62
Watford2
Reilly 8, Blissett 28

Luton: Findlay, Thomas, Turner, Parker, Elliott, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Elliott, Bunn, Hilaire. Substitute: Breacker did not play.

Watford: Coton, Bardsley, Jobson, Sinnott, Rostron, Taylor, Jackett, Callaghan, Blissett, Reilly, Barnes. Substitute: Gilligan for Taylor after 82 minutes.

Attendance: 12,192. Referee: A. Robinson (Hampshire).

Share of play: Watford 35 per cent.

Free kicks: Watford 17, Luton 27.

Corners: Watford 5, Luton 14.

Goal attempts on target (off target): Watford 9 (8), Luton 9 (7).

Watford goal attempts by: Blissett 5, Barnes 4, Jobson 2, Jackett 2, Reilly 2, Taylor 1, Rostron 1.

Bookings: Donaghy (Luton) for kicking the ball away — ungentlemanly conduct.

Les Taylor had presented Luton with two goals.

True Luton had the slope in their favour after the break but Watford found it all an uphill struggle. Findlay, with low-trajectory clearances, managed to overcome the effects of the wind to a greater degree than did Coton. In the end Watford were swamped and Luton could have won by a greater margin.

In the list of local derbies since hostilities were renewed some six years ago, Luton have had a few breaks with the results, and few of them have been deserved. Saturday's comprehensive second-half superiority was the most impressive since the Hatters won 4-1 at Kenilworth Road.

Watford's need for a captain — a man to rally the troops when setbacks occur and hopefully organise them on the field so such instances are rare — has long been acknowledged. The need becomes increasingly acute.

So too does the need to bring some fresh bite in midfield. This area was swamped in the second half on Saturday. Watford's clearances were quickly worked back through midfield, and pressure was again put on a defence which has always found a bustling attack easier to handle than the ball-playing skills of the likes of Luton.

It is the fashion to criticise the defence but considering the amount of pressure they were subjected to at Luton, they coped well. In fact they conceded just one goal in the siege after the break having given away two in open play before the interval.

Midfield continues to be an area of some concern and

the days when the two would seem to combat the three or four of the opposition (with a little help from their friends) are rarer now.

Callaghan "showed" for the ball to his credit during what was a personal nightmare as Turner policed him to a standstill.

On the left, John Barnes had a couple of inspired first-half runs and one in the second, but seemed drained from his mid-week outing in England colours. It was left to Blissett and Reilly to conjure something out of a meagre service and in this they fared admirably.

"Watford did not seem as confident or resilient as they used to be," summarised Pleat after the weekend and confidence certainly seems to be at a premium.

Taylor for Watford and Elliott for Luton forced early corners with good attempts, but it was the Hornets' corners which posed the most problems. Jobson went close from one and from the fourth, taken by Callaghan in the eighth minute, Reilly turned and headed the ball goalwards at the near post. His effort beat Findlay, crossed the line and was prevented from finding the back of the net by a hooked clearance. The linesman had no doubts that the ball was well over the line and a goal was duly awarded.



There seemed to be no question over the validity of this netting but considerable doubt surrounded Luton's equaliser in the 21st minute.

As both managers

shunned the after-match Press conference in mute protest at the way their previous quotes had been manipulated by Fleet Street, all of us were left with the impression that Richard Jobson had turned a non-dangerous situation into a Luton goal with a lofted 30-yard back-pass over the head of Tony Coton.

Indeed the Luton scoreboard backed the viewpoint but it has subsequently emerged that Frank Bunn gained the last touch — the vital deflection which lifted Jobson's back-pass into the air.

"I wish I had just popped in to tell the Press that. I thought it might be so at the time but I was by no means certain," said Pleat. His opposite number overheard a discussion on the own goal and so, after checking with Luton, the goal was awarded to Jobson. Pleat watched the video on Monday afternoon and confirmed that as Jobson struck the ball low towards his goalkeeper, Bunn stretched out a leg from behind the pivot and gained the deflection to send the ball soaring into the net.



One has to accept this viewpoint in which case one has considerably more sympathy for Jobson than was the case at the time. The Watford centre half seemed to be in no trouble as he turned to clip the ball back to the approaching Coton. If Bunn's intervention caught us by surprise on Monday morning, small wonder it flummoxed Jobson at the time. Bunn's outstretched foot caused the ball to lift and Luton were back on terms.

It was a lucky touch for Luton either way because they had not looked like scoring after Watford had taken the lead. In fact Watford had come the closest to increasing their lead — Barnes curling a free-kick towards the near post for Findlay to flail away for a corner and then the goalkeeper had saved well from the resultant flag-kick as Reilly sent in a firm header. Jackett too had gone close and Watford seemed to be growing in confidence before Luton's deflected equaliser.

Then Parker sent Coton full length to save his free-kick before Watford restored their advantage with a superb goal. Taylor hit a misclearance forward to Reilly who played the ball

inside for Blissett to race through and hit strongly beyond Findlay's reach.

But Luton bounced back within a minute. Taylor looked favourite to clear the ball but his hesitation enabled Stein to prod it to Bunn who sent a low shot wide of Coton.



Hill went close for Luton and at the other end Blissett went near with an overhead kick to Rostron's chipped pass. But perhaps the most interesting attempt came from Barnes who cut inside and shot for the goal. A defender rushed across, attempting to block the ball with outstretched hands. Watford appealed for a penalty without success.

Luton started the second half with a succession of attacks. Donaghy had a header touched on to the bar by Coton and the goalkeeper saved another good effort from Elliott.

Good work by Bardsley saved the day when Stein, plainly offside, broke clear for what looked a certain goal. In the 62nd minute few defences would have been able to defend against a superb chested pass from Hill into the inside-right channel where Elliott gathered the ball and thrashed it into the net from the edge of the box.

Blissett went close with a header and also forced Findlay to a save with a half-hit shot but the best save of the remaining minutes came from Coton, who dived and blocked a shot from Stein.

In the final minutes, Watford gave up the lost midfield battle and threw on Jimmy Gilligan as a fifth forward in place of Les Taylor. The ploy caused some concern in Luton's ranks but they survived the eight minutes coping with the unusual situation, and Watford finished the half for the first time in memory without winning or forcing one corner in 45 minutes.



In the final minute Callaghan epitomised the half, racing back to take a throw-in which was not only rightly penalised but even then painfully inaccurate.

In recent years Luton have turned a few certain and just draws into victories. On Saturday they were handed a win and took it with some forceful and impressive football.