

HORNETS STING FOR CUP REVENGE

WATFORD 3, LUTON TOWN 0

AFTER showing plenty of promise at Hillsborough, the Town were caught at Vicarage Road on Tuesday night by a Watford side smarting from recent results and determined to fight clear of the relegation-threatened pack in the First Division.

The Town showed some nice touches, but the home side had the finishing power that counted.

The result, with a penalty breaking the deadlock and a meaningless third goal in the last minute, was flattering to Watford.

But the Hornets' revenge for cup-tie defeat has put growing pressure on the Town at the bottom end of the table.

Unless the pretty approach work is complemented by a more lethal touch in front of goal, cup semi-final pleasure will be more than matched by the pain of seeing the league struggle continue week by week.

It was all the more exasperating at Watford because in terms of football skill the Town looked the better side in the early stages, only to be beaten by a team able to turn basic endeavour and hard work to advantage.

Watford deserved their victory on the night, and their manager Graham Taylor suggested that the seeds for success had been sewn long before the kick-off. Wat-

LUTON Town continued their battle against relegation with two games this week, at Hillsborough, Sheffield, on Saturday, and at Vicarage Road, Watford, on Tuesday.

Reports are by BRIAN SWAIN and pictures by MARK RICHARDS.

ford did not take kindly to losing in the cup to the Town, and had been fired up a little more by playing badly on Saturday when they were beaten at home by Chelsea.

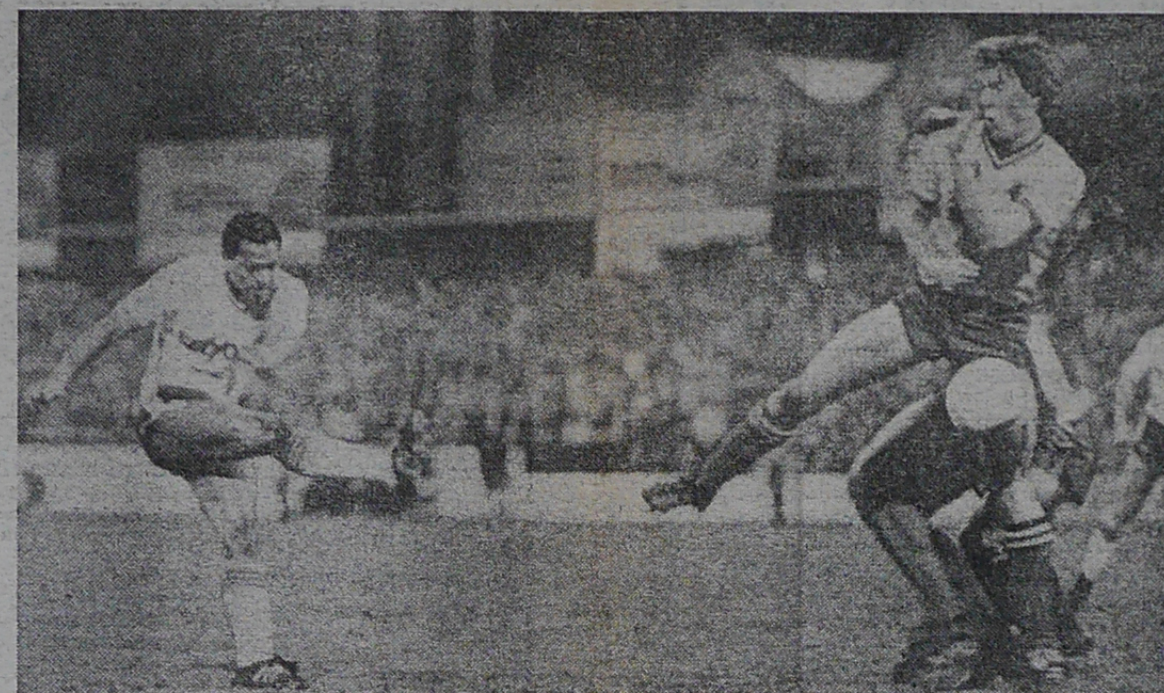
The Town put together more good passing movements, but once they had won the ball Watford showed a sharper appetite for working it into the Town's penalty area.

For the first 20 minutes it looked as though the Town were going to stamp their class on proceedings and get the second away win of the season that would have given them hope of an early climb up the table.

But Mick Harford had a sharp angled drive deflected round the post after a neat turn and shot from Garry Parker's throw-in, and Steve Foster headed wide after a good run to meet a corner on the far post.

Watford had threatened little in attack, but the inexperience of Mitchell Thomas swung the game in the 27th minute. Luther Blissett got goal-side of him down the right to run onto a neat flick by Nigel Callaghan, and Thomas and the England striker fell down in a heap. Referee Trevor Spencer and the linesman saw it as a push, and Blissett scored from the penalty.

Harford played a neat one-two with Ricky Hill to carve out the chance of an equaliser, but wasted it by blasting wide, and early in



● TRYING: Brian Stein has a shot charged down at Vicarage Road.

the second half the Town still looked capable of taking at least a point.

But Brian Stein was not quite as sharp as he had been at Sheffield; Peter Nicholas, David Preece and Hill were unable to turn midfield touches into incisive forward play, and Watford soaked up everything the Town tried.

The second goal was a gem, in its taking if not in the build-up. The Town were pressing forward as Watford defended in numbers. A long punted clearance by Tony Coton was laid off by Blissett towards the right wing and from the edge of the penalty area Callaghan swerved and dipped a shot of telling skill to beat Les Sealey.

Oddly, the goalkeeper hardly had a serious save to make, but Callaghan's goal left the Town with too much to do with only 15 minutes to go.

They had looked good defensively, but the introduction of Meka Nwajobi for Parker made no difference to the Town's inability to unsettle Watford's deep defence.

The final goal, in the last minute, was one of those things — the Town had pushed forward hopefully, were caught out by a long clearance, and Blissett scored his 22nd goal of the season after a quick exchange of passes with John Barnes.

DETAILS

TOWN: Sealey, Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas, Hill, Parker (Nwajobi, 75 mins), Nicholas, Preece, Stein, Harford.

WATFORD: Coton, Bardsley, McClelland, Terry, Rostron, Callaghan, Taylor, Jackell, Barnes, Blissett, Gilligan, Sub, Porter, not needed.

THE GOALS: Luther Blissett penalty 27 minutes, after he had been pushed over by Mitchell Thomas; Nigel Callaghan 75 minutes, brilliant dipping shot from edge of the box; Blissett 89th minute, when the Town were committed to all-out attack and caught on the break.

OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved, three wide; Watford five saved and four wide. Corners: 6-3 to Watford.

ATTENDANCE: 14,411, Watford's lowest of the season.

REFEREE: Trevor Spencer, Salisbury, not always in tune with his linesmen.

ENTERTAINMENT: Another hard local derby with Watford deserving to win this time, though not by three goals.



● SO NEAR: Mick Harford, on the right, was close to giving the Town the lead in the first ten minutes at Watford. The picture shows how narrow was Watford's escape.

● BEATEN: Skipper Steve Foster joins a Town attack at Watford, but this time he was beaten to the punch by goalkeeper Tony Coton.