

Harford penalty clinches Hatters' first victory

West Ham 0, Luton 1

A MICK Harford penalty gave Luton their first win of the season at Upton Park yesterday.

A gritty determined performance secured the points for the Hatters, who had to withstand a blistering last five minutes of pressure, in a match short on thrills and punctuated by a series of spills.

Rob Johnson, the 23-year-old Hatter whose career was twice nearly finished by crippling knee injuries, was given the chance to resurrect his future at Upton Park yesterday.

Johnson, preferred to Grimes, was the only change from the Luton team that drew 2-2 with Newcastle on Wednesday.

West Ham included £340,000 signing Frank McAvennie who David Pleat tried to lure to Kenilworth during the summer. When the teams met at Upton Park last season, both were in danger of relegation and the game ended 0-0.

Hammers England centre-back Alvin Martin, set about spoiling Mick Harford's growing reputation with some ultra-close marking and was guilty of a bad foul on the Luton striker just minutes into the game.

It was Harford who carried out the first chance for Luton after six minutes when he put Stein in with a chance, but, West Ham's defence denied Stein a clean sight of goal and the chance was lost.

Johnson, over-lapping on the right wing, produced a cross-cum-shot that forced Parkes to stretch to grab the ball.

After 14 minutes Martin put the ball in the net from close range after a poor punched clearance from 'keeper Dibble. But referee Terry Holbrook awarded a foul against the 'keeper.

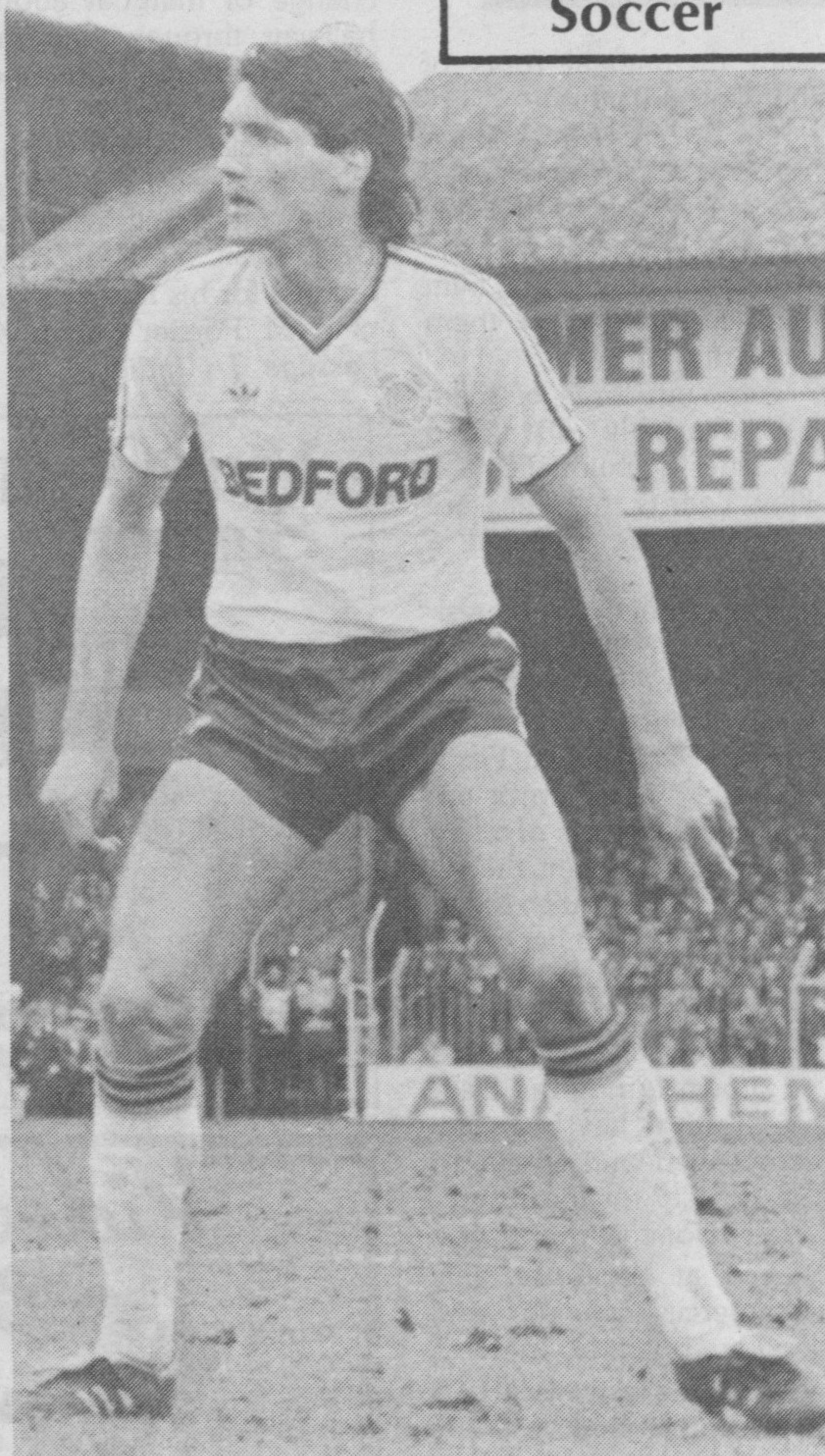
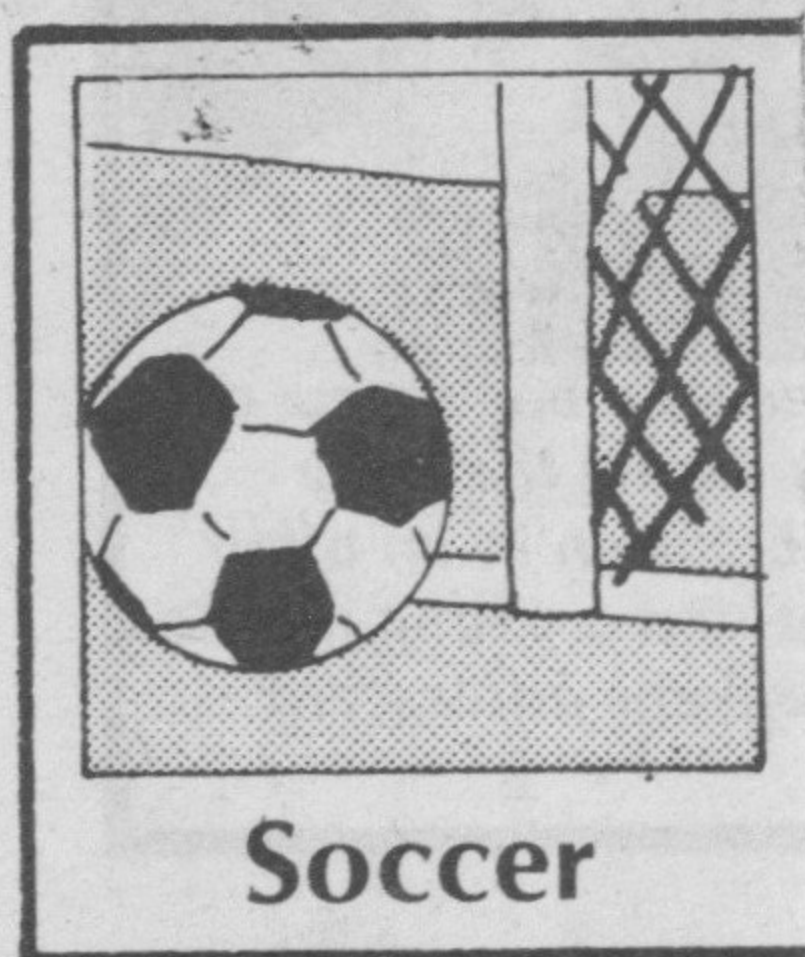
The home crowd came to life a minute later then McAvennie threw himself at a cross by Walford but the spectacular header flew just wide.

The early play became bogged down in midfield as the sides looked for an opening. And with 30 minutes gone, neither 'keeper had been forced to make a serious save.

Just after the 30 minute mark, Elliott produced a great swing tackle to stop Dickens bearing down on Dibble's goal.

There was a scare for Luton shortly before the break, when Elliott, playing just his second first team game after recovering from a broken leg, went down injured and resumed with his left ankle heavily strapped.

Report by
Graham Punter



Mick Harford — winning penalty.

Two minutes later the game was held up again, this time when the West Ham trainer had to attend to McAvennie, injured in a collision with Dibble as the Luton 'keeper raced outside the penalty area to clear his line.

The best chance of the first period came on the stroke of half-time when a corner by Ward was met well by the head of Martin and Dibble just managed to grab the ball on the line.

Crunch

The second-half began as the first had ended with trainers playing a dominant part in the proceedings.

Just seconds after the break, Stewart went down in a crunching tackle by Harford which earned the Luton striker a prolonged lecture, but no booking.

The break-through came after 48 minutes when Nwajiobi played a delicate ball into Stein and as Stein tricked his way past Stewart he was hauled down for a penalty. Mick Harford, who missed from the spot in a pre-season game, made no mistake on this occasion.

Luton began to find opening's as West Ham

pushed forward to get more into the game and play became fast, furious and not a little physical.

Nwajiobi was unlucky with a header after Harford flicked on a free kick.

But West Ham had their moments too and began to dominate midway through the second-half.

Elliott missed a clearance following a corner and Dibble did well to keep out the shot that followed from Gale. The pressure from West Ham brought the 14,104 crowd alive and Hammers were nearly on terms when Ward shot wide and Dickens had a header grabbed on the line by Dibble.

Luton were now relying on break-away attacks and could have gone further ahead when Harford allowed the ball to run to Parkes whose shot was well saved by 'keeper Parkes.

West Ham: Parkes, Stewart, Walford, Gale, Martin, Devonshire, Ward, McAvennie, Dickens, Cottee, Orr. Sub: Campbell.

Luton: Dibble, Johnson, Thomas, Nicholas, Elliott, Donaghy, Parker, Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi, Preece. Sub: North.