

Albion are the April Fools

85/86

LUTON 3 WEST BROMWICH ALBION 0

WEST Brom, accustomed to their role of sacrificial offerings, duly laid down before the executioner's sword once again on Tuesday.

In their death throes they mustered the odd threat to Les Sealey's goal but there was really no doubting their fate from the first whistle, writes Graham Punter.

Hatters won at a canter and had they stepped up the pace to a gallop they might have delivered the double figure scoreline craved by the crowd.

It was almost exhibition stuff. Ricky Hill enjoyed more space than he has seen all season and responded with magnificent

touches capped by a world-class goal.

Tim Breacker, pounding up and down the field in his new attacking midfield role, left Albion breathless with his power and pace.

Foster and Donaghy, as ever rocks in defence, had ample time to enjoy forays up field and both were unlucky not to figure on the scoresheet.

Albion stuck to their task like professionals but were constantly out-paced, under-powered and out-classed.

The return of Hill after a calf strain was

the catalyst for making April Fools out of Albion and, courtesy of Watford's win over Arsenal, taking Hatters to sixth place in the table.

The warning signs were there from the opening seconds when Harford's drive was tipped over by keeper Stuart Naylor, once destined to join the Hatters before Luton moved in for Andy Dibble.

Donaghy hit the bar before the inevitable breakthrough after 14 minutes. Preece sent in a deep free kick, Albion were naively

drawn away by Foster and Harford, leaving Hill to head across the box and enable Newell to nod over the line.

Seconds later Dickinson handled as he competed with Hill for another Preece free kick and Harford thumped home the penalty.

The gem was Hill's goal after 51 minutes. Breacker played in a delightful pass, Hill controlled majestically and swept the ball past Naylor all in one silky movement.

Hatters had numerous chances to widen the gap. Foster hit the bar, Hill was denied by a superb save from Naylor, Newell had an attempt knocked off the line and Donaghy, Preece, Harford and Breacker all went

agonisingly close.

Albion's beleaguered forces rallied to hit a post via Whitehead and Madden missed a sitter.

But there was always the impression that if Albion had scored, it would have been a straightforward matter for Luton to have restored the advantage.

Manager David Pleat praised Luton's opening spell as "absolutely excellent".

Luton: Sealey, Johnson, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas, Hill, Breacker, Nicholas, Preece, Harford, Newell. Sub: Stein (M).

WBA: Naylor, Whitehead, Dyson, Palmer, Statham, Bradley, Mackenzie, Dickinson, Thompson, Varadi, Madden. Sub: Grealish.

● Crowd 9,226.