

Luton complete double over the Hornets

ON A DAY when the Luton manager described critics of their artificial surface as being “prejudiced and jealous” Watford experienced considerable discomfort on the “carpet”, rallied but were finally and deservedly beaten.

That the pitch played a part in Watford's downfall cannot be argued but neither cannot it excuse the fact the 11 point gap between the teams in the table was accurately reflected in the exchanges.

What the surface achieved on Saturday was to highlight and exaggerate the different styles. Luton's passing approach being more suited to the conditions, gave them the appearance of thoroughbreds in the first half and at one stage the Hatters threatened to give the Hornets their biggest hiding at Kenilworth Road for many years.

Watford rallied, helped it must be said by a gift of a penalty, and finished with some credit but there was a tendency for some, sceptical of the so-called Watford approach to use the game as an example of “purist” thinking versus the all-action artisans.

From the evidence of a single afternoon, Luton's football appeared the more flowing, the more entertaining and the more effective. However, in four First Division seasons, this is the first time they have been able to laud it over the Hornets from a higher position in the final table. And Luton have still to emulate the runners-up, FA Cup Final and European achievements of their rivals. When it comes to effectiveness, Watford have hit more highspots since chasing the Hatters out of the Second Division.

Luton 3.....Watford 2
Harford 10, 31, 34 Jactett 58 (pen)
 Sinnott 78

Watford: Coton: Gibbs, Terry, McClelland, Sinnott; Talbot, Jactett; Sterling, Allen, West, Barnes. Substitute: Bardsley for Allen after 59 minutes.
Luton: Sealey; Breacker, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi, Preece. Substitute: Johnson, not used.
Referee: Dennis Hedges (Oxford). Very poor.
Attendance: 11,810.
Share of play: Watford 45 per cent.
Entertainment value: Well above average for end of season game despite the constant whistling.
Clear-cut chances: Watford 4, Luton 5.
Free kicks: Watford 27, Luton 30.
Corners: Watford 8, Luton 11.
Goal attempts on target (off target): Watford 7 (7), Luton 12 (13).
Watford goal attempts by: Barnes 3, Gibbs 2, Sinnott 2, Jactett 2, Allen 2, West 1, Bardsley 1, Talbot 1.
Bookings: Jactett (18) and Coton (67) for dissent.

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At the derby games, David Pleat and Graham Taylor have invariably presented a joint front, coming in together for the after-match Press conference. On this occasion Taylor came in late and had the final word.

“Luton string their passes together well and a lot of times they are effective,” said the Watford manager. “But their first goal came from the kick down the middle by their keeper which we did not head away properly. Their second came from a free kick which we had bad luck in our efforts to clear. The pitch caused Kenny Jactett to stumble as he tried to clear. The third goal came from a scramble after we had a clearance blocked. It was put away well, but that is how the goals came,” he added,

drawing attention to the fact that none of the goals came from the rash of Luton passing that was the highlight of the game.

Later Taylor pointed out that Seeley kicked the ball as far down the field as possible on all but one occasion.

As to his being prejudiced and jealous of the surface, Taylor's views are well known. “I think those comments demonstrate that there is a tendency to be sensitive about the pitch and so a purist attitude is adopted,” said Taylor.

On the subject of the pitch which is even narrower now to accommodate the adverts of the General Motors sponsors, it is worth remembering that both Everton and Liverpool, the top passing sides in the country, give the concept of artificial pitches the thumbs down. Their football success suggests they are neither prejudiced nor ignorant.

As for the comparisons between Luton and Watford's style, Watford do not come off so well on this occasion. But then the plain fact is that the Hornets have had a disjointed and mediocre season during which they have seldom got their act together for any really sustained periods.

In the end, the difference between the two sides hinged on Harford, a player Taylor signed as an apprentice at Lincoln and has since tried to secure before piped by Pleat.

Had Harford been leading the Watford front line, doubt if he would have hesitated in taking a clear chance as did West on Saturday. Had West not looked to make certain of the opening, allowing Foste time to recover, it may well have been a different game with everyone drawing an entirely different conclusion at the end of it.

Harford is a seasoned campaigner however, five or six years older than West. But for all the talk and speculation, Watford do not possess a player capable of dispatching the ball as did Harford when he completed his hat-trick with his best goal of the afternoon.

Even so there is another view. Had Watford adopted in the first half, the tactics they introduced after the break, would they have been chasing a two-goal lead?

Watford pushed Sinnott up into midfield and Gibbs moved forward. “We got tighter on them, knowing that we still risked their breaking down the wings. But we put three on three in an effort to change things,” said Taylor.

As a result the Hornets created more problems for the opposition and, had Bardsley tucked away a late chance, then Watford might have started to



David Bardsley watches as Lee Sinnott puts Watford back in the game at Kenilworth Road.

and the second with first-time strikes.

“In the main, goals are scored with one touch. If you think about becoming a goalscorer, then you have to be prepared for that,” said Taylor. “You have to shoot when there is a chance. You rarely get a chance to open up the whole of the goal and see the whole eight yards.”

In many ways this has

summed up Watford's approach this season. On Saturday Colin West and later, if to a far lesser degree, Kenny Jactett, should have shot earlier.

“You have to be brave enough to be prepared to miss goals if you want to score. Luther Blissett succeeded because he was prepared to be guilty of misses,” said the manager.

Watford match facts

LUTON, playing up the slope and with the wind in their favour, had by far the better of the first half. Once they took the lead, they always threatened to increase it and, after going 2-0 ahead in the 33rd minute, they threatened to swamp the Hornets.

Watford's goal had a lucky escape early on when Breacker sped in from the right and crossed. Harford's effort was blocked by Terry and Breacker played the ball back in, only for Preece to see his attempt similarly blocked.

In the 13th minute Sealey kicked upfield, Terry headed down and then slipped as Preece played the ball through for Harford to drill the first in a hat-trick of goals past Coton.

Barnes headed just over from a corner and, at the other end, Coton was well-positioned to take a shot from Nicholas.

Jactett, harshly penalised in a challenge, was booked for dissent and it seemed as if the game was slipping away from Watford. But then Gibbs played the ball through to West who was clear with only the goalkeeper to beat but delayed the final shot so long that Foster was able to break back at him and clear for a corner.

Jactett was put through on the right from a ball by Barnes but twice had shooting options only to try and set up a colleague. The first cross was missed by

Breacker and Nwajiobi combined before the latter swept the ball over the bar.

Watford had a let-off just before the interval when Stein fired straight at Coton from a few feet out as the visitors looked set to be cut to ribbons.

After the break, Nwajiobi shot just wide with a snapshot and McClelland got back well to block from Preece after the latter had escaped the offside trap.

Stealey saved from a low shot by Jactett but, in the 58th minute, the Watford midfielder man found the net from the penalty spot. McClelland, opting to drive the ball into the goalmouth, mishit it straight at Thomas. The ball struck the player's hand but there seemed little possibility of the full back intending to handle the ball.

Jactett fired in the spot kick, hitting it high to the goalkeeper's left and Watford were back in the game. The Hornets were given extra impetus by the introduction of Bardsley for a subdued Allen. Coton was booked for dissent although there seems some doubt as to whether he was booked for a foul on Stein.

Having bounced back into the game, Watford threw away the chance with some bad defending. Terry headed the ball out to Barnes who turned and drove his clearance against an on-rushing Luton player. The ball dropped into the centre where several Watford players challenged. After it had bounced around, the ball fell to Harford who hit it at waist

the ball into the roof of the goal. The other five players who were left off last summer with the exception of the year end of the year towards the end of the year. “We've had a good run finished third in the table. They won 13-3 and over Old Haberdashers. Promoted Greenwood is generated. That most of the new growth from outside the borough

start against experienced Sun Sports at Aldenham Road. Sun's top pair Jane Ashwell/Julie Hornsby won all their sets. Park began with a win in Men's Division One, beating Cassiobury 6-3. The Parks and Sue Penhale/Karen Willis got a singleton for a 6-3 win.

Alstair and Glen Clarke

Reissner won two to love

entre Dave Coombs

ected a personal rally of

points, with a try, three

reversions and two

to skipper Andrew Jenkins

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