

Passion dies in the last derby

LUTON T.....2
WATFORD ... 1

UNDERSTRENGTH and leg-weary, the Town were unable to play with the sparkle that glinted off the Littlewoods Cup paraded to happy acclaim around Kenilworth Road on Monday.

Watford, already relegated after a season of too much change within the club, fought for their pride, were lucky to escape a first-half drubbing, and then comfortably held their own after the interval.

With further injuries hitting the Town's selection, the big bonus was another promising performance by David Oldfield, following the transformation he wrought when he went on as sub as Norwich.

With Mark Stein forced out by a groin strain the 19-year-old was given his full debut and marked it with a cracking goal and another refreshing display of enthusiasm.

He had the willingness and the legs to run for everything, including apparently lost causes, on a day when many men were showing the weariness that marks end of season games.

Motivation and tiredness were the twin reasons given by coach Jimmy Ryan for the feeble second-half display on a day when manager Ray Harford went to other games to check on players he might buy for next season.

While Oldfield enjoyed his big chance to impress a bank holiday crowd, luckless Marvin Johnson,

replacing injured Mal Donaghy, had to be big enough to overcome the indignity of scoring an own goal to gift Watford the lead.

Both teams played an open game, with four men in midfield including two pushing up on the flanks, and if the Town had been able to maintain their early excellence it might have been a massacre.

Tony Coton saved Watford twice in the first six minutes, diving to his left to deny Danny Wilson in a one-to-one confrontation, then going to his right to stop Rob Johnson's half-volley.

Ian Allinson had been involved in both moves as the Town swept forward menacingly for the first half hour.

But they were caught on the break in the 31st minute when Watford cleared a corner and Stuart Rimmer raced down the left with only Tim Breacker and Andy Dibble between him and the goal.

Breacker jockeyed to make time, but Rimmer switched the ball half a yard inside and curled in a superb shot. In was worth a goal, but after eluding Dibble's attempt to save the ball hit the bar. Rod Thomas whacked it back into the danger area and Marvin Johnson, charging back to cover, hit the bar with an intended

clearance and the ball rebounded on to him and into the net.

Four minutes later Oldfield earned his reward when Steve Foster's long ball and Kingsley Black's flick to the left set the young centre-forward free. He looked hopelessly angled, but got his left foot around the ball to unleash a real net-buster past Coton.

The goal lifted the Town and 18 seconds into stoppage time Foster rose to meet a Wilson free kick, missed because of a shove by Mark Morris, and Wilson slammed in this fourth penalty goal of the season.

For the second half, the Town were able to amble through with neither defence put under much pressure in a game strangely denuded of the normal local derby passion and commitment.

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Dibble; Breacker, Foster, M. Johnson, Grimes; R. Johnson, Wilson, Hill, Black; Allinson, Oldfield. Subs: Cobb and Nwajobi, not used.

WATFORD: Coton; Gibbs, Morris, McLelland, Rostron (Sherwood 72 mins); Thomas (Hodges 72 mins), Jackett, Porter, Holden; Rimmer, Roberts.

THE GOALS: Marvin Johnson own goal for Watford, 31st minute; David Oldfield for the Town, 35th minute; Danny Wilson penalty for the Town, 45th minute.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved and six wide; Watford four saved, three wide and two hit the bar in the incident leading to the own goal. Corners: 8-3 to Watford.

REFEREE: Kevin Breen, Liverpool.

ATTENDANCE: 10,409.

ENTERTAINMENT: Nice first half, shame about the second.