

The fans showed it but where was Watford's derby passion?

TO the embarrassment of many Watford fans and followers, the Hornets put in a particularly inept display before the live television cameras at Kenilworth Road on Sunday.

On a pitch that cut up badly and played with great inconsistency, Watford were never at the races and gave one of the limpest local derby performances in living memory.

In theory, struggling Luton, without a home win to their credit this season, were there for the taking. Short on experience, low on confidence and traumatised by the car crash, which hospitalised their central defender Darren Salton, the Hatters emerged from Sunday's mud with their first three home points having turned the tables so completely on the visitors. Indeed, it was Watford who looked like a team battling without too much conviction against relegation.

It was so one-sided that, after the match, there was some debate about the measure of Watford's commitment, spawned by the puerile quality of their display. That the Hornets were committed, there is no doubt, but when it comes to the dividing line between that and the passion you usually associate with local derbys, only Trevor Putney and Andy Hessenthaler, crossed over.

Watford were outfought and outfootballed and, it would appear, outthought. The visitors' lamentable failure to utilise the only relatively firm areas on the pitch, the flanks, was one of the more obvious shortcomings. The introduction of Darren Bazeley came far too late to have any effect. The need for a substitution had been apparent for some time if Watford were to wrest the game from Luton's grip, although Perryman contends that the full backs should have provided this service in the first hour.

It took the Hornets some 59 minutes before they won a corner and even longer to raise their first on-target shot — a blocked effort from Ken Charlery. Of the other seven goal-attempts Watford mustered, Jason Drydale's free kick had some venom but little accuracy and Keith Dublin's header was well-executed but, in the end, he nodded the ball wide from what was the nearest the visitors came to creating a clear-cut chance.

The pitch was a problem but one which faced both teams and despite the fact it would stick in some parts and run in others, Luton retained that Pleat-like determination to play the ball around. The Hornets attempted to run the ball through a crowded

LUTON TOWN.....2

Benjamin 72,
Oakes 75.



WATFORD0

92/93

■ **LUTON TOWN:** Chamberlain; Dreyer, James, Johnson, Hughes, Peake, Oakes, Benjamin, Rees, Gray, Preece. Substitutes: Williams for Oakes after 89 mins; Skelton not used.

■ **WATFORD:** Suckling; Holdsworth; Lavin, Ashby, Dublin, Drysdale; Hessenthaler, Putney, Porter; Willis, Charlery. Substitutes: Bazeley for Lavin after 79 mins; Nogan not used.

■ **DATE:** 29-11-92.

■ **ATTENDANCE:** 8,341. ■ **REFEREE:** D Frampton (Dorset). Let Rees off the hook for his initial foul on Hessenthaler but was right with his three subsequent Luton bookings.

■ **ENTERTAINMENT VALUE:** Fine for Luton fans, non-existent for Watford's.

■ **CLEAR-CUT CHANCES:** Watford 1,

Luton 3.

■ **WATFORD'S MAN OF THE MATCH:** Perry Suckling.

■ **SHARE OF PLAY:** Watford 30 per cent

■ **ASSISTS:** None.

■ **CONDITIONS:** Damp, cold; quagmire pitch.

■ **FREE KICKS — total (for offside):** Watford 19 (4), Luton 18 (11).

■ **CORNERS:** Watford 3, Luton 12.

■ **GOAL ATTEMPTS — on-target (off-target):** Watford 1 (7), Luton 10 (6).

■ **WATFORD GOAL ATTEMPTS BY:** Willis 2, Charlery 1, Lavin 1, Hessenthaler 1, Putney 1, Dublin 1, Drysdale 1.

■ **DESERVED RESULT:** A Luton win.

■ **BOOKINGS:** Preece for an altercation with Putney (22); Rees for foul on Willis (40); Gray for foul on Lavin (76).

midfield or thump it upfield from deeper positions with very little success. Add to this the particularly naive attempts to break forward, falling repeatedly for elementary offside, and Watford's offensive ambitions were rendered pathetic.

Put in the simplest terms, while Luton attempted to play football and establish some pattern to the game, all Watford could offer was a preparedness to run about and get muddy.

Defeat at or by Luton is never easy to accept, but this was doubly humiliating. Not only was the debacle paraded before a large television audience but Watford's performance was so bad it was embarrassing. Throughout there was the impression that the home side were the only ones to treat the game as a local derby whereas Watford seemed surprised by their fervour. Graham Taylor and David Pleat did much to take the spite out of exchanges on the terraces, but there was never a shortage of zeal, passion and incident on the pitch.

On Sunday, there was almost an element of surrender as Luton, always looking the hungrier of the two sides, finally broke through in a match in which they had asked all the questions.

In midfield, despite the determination of Hessenthaler and Putney in particular, the combative Jason Rees and David Preece emerged as the dominant force while the Hornets' attack, depleted by the absence of Furlong and the less-than-fully-fit Nogan, looked particularly powderpuff.

At times Luton overstepped the boundaries between passion and the cruder aspects of the game and their three bookings reflected some of these over-zealous outbursts but this could also be seen

as another example of the home side being more fired up for the game than were the visitors.

Not even the most jaundiced of Watford fans could argue the fact that the points were fully deserved by Luton. For over an hour, the Hatters toiled without success against a determined Watford defence and the game had begun to take on the appearance of a goalless draw. Thoughts of Watford 'escaping' with a point, because of Luton's inadequacies in front of goal, began to take shape while Luton feared that the Hornets might wrest an undeserved victory with a breakaway goal.

On such a pitch there was always the likelihood that the game might be decided by a mistake, but apart from the woeful marking for the first goal, and the lack of defensive discipline which enabled Luton to score their second, the game was won by two touches of class.

Ian Benjamin stretched back to a left-wing cross to steer a magnificent header past Perry Suckling, the Watford goalkeeper who had excelled during the course of the afternoon. Logistically it was similar to Luther Blissett's televised header against Everton some years back, the body going away from goal and the head steering the ball goalwards.

Similarly, Scott Oakes drove the ball so sweetly beyond Suckling for the second goal after outstripping the defence. They were both excellent strikes worthy of winning a local derby, but this humiliation for the visitors, was not a game they would wish to remember.

Luton won, won well and deserved their success: Watford also played.

—Oliver Phillins



Watford challenge for a corner but without success in the Luton goalmouth.

J 487921.