Otto's stunning strike leaves then drooling

WHILE hundreds of fans rushed in at the Stadium of Light opening gates, John Hanson hurried for his draw bonus. "He doesn't game like."

"I was very happy to score, especially in my first game here," he said. "But we are still disappointed with the result. We should have won.

"At half-time we were well on top and the boss told us to go back out there and give a better performance.

"Once we gave away silly goals, although Peter Otto's strike was a real thunderbolt. Albert Ball at least saw it and was pleased.

Manager David Pleat was also pleased with everything in the first half. "We moved smoothly and second we stopped play we tend hitting in longer.

"The Town had to change their midfield for the game, because converted full-back Dave Linzon was ruled out by a hamstring injury.

Scott Oakes returned, and the manager said that it was something of a gamble and that he was happy to put the defensive player in the midfield.

"It wasn't so noticeable when we were going forward, but we looked a bit flagging after Southend came into the game," he said. "They were being outplayed but the game came on to have a little bit of our shape.

"But it was an excellent team performance in the first half. We dominated Southend had nothing to lose and came for us. Ricky Otto became more effective and they picked up a little bit.

"We are good when we are passing the ball around, but we know the first goal should have been disallowed. We should have defended the corner better.

"It's the second game in a row we have lost a corner this season, and we should learn from that. But for the second time we have had to concede to Otto, because he is a wonderful player.

The Southend star was home with the sponsors' day of the match-day hospitality. The Town stars were there to present the trophy to pick up the award for a very long time.

Eric Lakin, Southend have a history of taking stars like Sam Collins, Peter Taylor and, most, but manager Frank Sinclair said he was not aware of Otto's value to his team.

"He's a very special talent," he said. "That strike was good enough to win any game, let alone a local derby.

"At half-time we had a very talk more frankly than we have done before, and to explain what we had to do for footballers.

"The second half they did what we wanted us, and I think that was as well as I have ever seen us play.

"Both sides at the Town were concerned that they had allowed away one soft goal, and I was just as sure that the balance of the game evened up. "I am not very happy about the second goal," he said. "It could and should have been prevented."

GOAL . . . The strike that put the Town 2-1 ahead: John Harbson, grounded on the right, had burst into the Southend penalty area and Chris Powell, Southend's No. 2, is also on the deck after his attempted tackle sent the ball to Ceri Hughes, on the left. Dwight Marshall is the Luton man getting out of the way as the low shot slips towards the net.

Hartson gambles pays early dividends

NO GOAL . . . Scott Oakes tumbles after a vain attempt to get a first-half header on target, with John Harbson hoping for a break. The ball ran to Ceri Hughes, who shot over the bar from the edge of the penalty area.

LUTON Town fans were laughing all the way to the bookies at half-time on Saturday, cleaning out the Ladbrokes kiosk when they offered 7-1 on 19-year-old John Hartson scoring the first goal of the game against Southend.

By the end they were crying into their beer as the Town threw away a glorious chance of the first victory of the season.

LUTON TOWN 2 SOUTHEND UTD 2 (Half-time 1-0)

They should have been well ahead at half-time. The first chance came in the 6th minute when Preece spun from clear. He hit a stinging drive which Sansome did well to shove round the post.

Southend suffered in those ten Dominic Iorfa, one of their two first-ta tumped off with a knee ligament injury the 34th minute.

Juergen Sommer had to stir himself save Gary Poole's 20-yarder, but it long time until sides failed to hit him.

That all changed in the last five minu of the half when the Town sudden ly the high spots.

It began with Teffer driving a fine pass – it looked as though it might ha been an unrushed shot at goal – and Burton fell to Harbson on the edge of a penalty area.

It an instant he had got it under control shimmied away from Chris Powell attempted tackle, and cracked a right-fo cross-shot into the far corner.

It was a brilliant piece of finishing at the Southend goal, took a pounding the decisive half-time whistle sounded.

They survived because Hughes gr over the bar from a good position after cree John Brandwood missed an elbo at the penalty area by Edwards. He used his hands to block a shot by Harbson.

The half-time hamtrain and chocolate arrs at unwelcome interruption to a team that had just been getting into its stride.

Initial Southend picked themselves up and studied the second half as sorely as the Town had done the first.

Martin Johnson was unlucky with a volley from a deep corner by Oakes. The drive was deflected for a corner.

And the referee came under fire in the build-up to the 51st minute equalise.

Trevor Peake was shadowing the ball going out of play, with sub Ian Martin stapping at his heels.

Hone fans yelled for a free kick to the Town, but the corner was awarded, and the self-destruct button was pressed.

Peake's flag kick dropped to the edge of the six-yard area, with Sommer choosing to go for it.

He missed the ball completely, with Hanson accidentally flicking it on, and Keith Dublin was unmarked, at close range, to head a gift for a team that had not scored in three matches since the opening day of the season.

The pattern changed dramatically, with Southend full of confidence. Mark Hone should have scored, but shot wide after he had rounded Sommer. Moments later he fell following a blistering free kick by Poole, and Ricky Otto scored over from a corner.

The former Orient man, a £100,000 bargain, turned in a man of the match display after that, showing speed and trick-ery. Otto's goal was the result of changing positions.

But Harbson made another telling contribution, which should have settled the Town's nerves with the promotion go. His strength on the ball took him through two defenders on the edge of the penalty area.

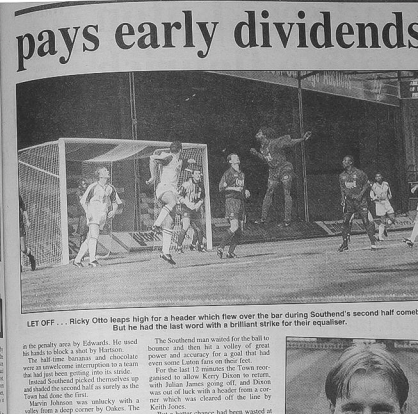
Luckless Powell was fall-guy for Hanson again, ending in a heap and which knocked the ball square to Hughes.

His shot went through a crowd of legs into the corner of the net, with Sansome making a hash of the attempted save.

Four minutes later manager Pleat made a change which had the opposite effect to the one intended.

Marshall had been tiring after putting in a lot of hard work, and was taken off to allow Mitchell Thomas to make his first appearance of the season.

He got on just in time to see a poor Gustavo Inzaghi by Johnson fall to Otto, 20 yards from goal.



LET OFF . . . Ricky Otto leaps high for a header which flew over the bar during Southend's second half comeback. But he had the last word with a brilliant strike for their equaliser.

The Southend man waited for the ball to bounce and then hit a volley of great power and accuracy for a goal that had even some Luton fans on their feet.

For the last 12 minutes the Town rearguined to allow Kerry Dixon to return with Julian James going off, and Dixon was out of luck with a header from a corner which was cleared off the line by Keith Jones.

But a better chance had been wasted at the other end, by Otto of all men. Martin h flick put him clear, but Sommer managed to half-stop the shot and Johnson completed the clearance.

The draw might have been a fair result, but the third in a row was well below expectations. Sides like Southend need to be seen off if the Town are to prosper at Fortress Kenilworth

If not Ladbrokes will soon get their money back after the caning they took on Saturday.

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES BY GARETH OWEN

JOHN HARTSON: His goal stung the bookies

TIT FOR TAT . . . Luton Town goalscorer John Hartson shows Southend's Keith Dublin he can be a bit handy as well.

COCA-COLA CUP

Town lose their cup sparkle

FULHAM 1 LUTON TOWN 1 (AET)
Fulham won 4-3 on penalties

AFTER winning the competition in 1988 and being runners-up a year later, Luton Town have become one of the markers to do what is now the Coca-Cola Cup.

A penalty shoot-out defeat at Fulham, after being reduced to ten men, was par for the course – Luton have not won a League Cup game since David Pleat returned as manager!

In 1990 they managed to beat Mansfield, but then went out at Brentford, on penalties, in Jim Ryan's season as manager.

And every year since then they have been dumped at the first hurdle, always by opposition from a lower division.

Third Division Fulham deserved their success on a night of high drama. Rob Haworth headed them into the lead in the 15th minute, and they played with much more fire and enthusiasm.

On 73 minutes Ceri Hughes was sent off, for retaliation after a foul by Michael Moon, but that led to the equaliser. The free-kick was given against Moon, and Marvin Johnson headed it off for David Preece to send the ball forward. Dwight Marshall timed his header perfectly to leave even the excellent Jan Stannard helpless.

The Town played well, but had probably lost the tie at Kenilworth Road a week earlier when Stannard's heroics denied them.

At Craven Cottage, Fulham got by on passion and hunger for success, and eventually the lucky break when Stannard pounced right to save the crucial shoot-out kick by Dwight Marshall.

There were no recriminations from the manager. "It's terribly disappointing to lose on penalties," said David Pleat. "But before the match I told the players there would be no recriminations if anyone missed. Baggio did, in the World Cup, and it has happened to others in important games.

"What was so disappointing for me was that we did so well tactically, even with ten men. I could not ask for more in terms of effort, but we had a problem in finding some splendid play into goals. We were praying for a goal."

The Town turned up the heat after an hour, by sending on Scott Oakes in place of David Greene; but had a lot of time (30 minutes) when Marvin Johnson tripped Moon in the 13th minute when the penalty will over the bar, and Gary Brazil blazed the penalty wide over the bar.

The incident underlined a strange refereeing performance by Mike Peace from Hampshire. The red card for Hughes was justified.

Some of the five bookings were not, and Terry Hurlock got away with a bone-cruncher on David Preece that was not even called a foul. Johnson had been booked earlier, and was very relieved not to be given at least a second yellow card for the penalty offence.

Having missed the penalty that would have settled it in extra time, Brazil was one of four Fulham men who did not make the same mistake in the shoot-out.

Coca-Cola tie at a glance

TOWN: Sommer; James (Dixon 78 mins), Peake, Greene, Johnson, Oakes; Teffer, Preece, Hughes, Marshall (Thomas 73 mins), Harbson. Goalscorer sub Barber.

SOUTHEND: Sansome; Poole, Edwards, Dublin, Powell; Jones, Hone, Sysoe, Otto; Thomson (Hunt 83 mins), Iorfa (Martin 33 mins). Goalscorer sub Sinclair.

THE GOALS: (1-04 mins): John Harbson, sweet turn off his marker and crop low drive after collaborating with Ceri Hughes. (1-1 53 mins): Kerry Dublin, ninth header after Harbson got the inadvertent flick-on from a corner by Gary Poole, leaving Juergen Sommer stranded in his goal. (2-1 73 minutes): Ceri Hughes, shot under Paul Sansome's body after Harbson cut the Southend defence apart with a surging run to make the opening. (2-2 75 mins): Ricky Otto, stunning angled volley to punish the clearance header by Marvin Johnson.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Luton: two saved and four wide. Southend: six saved and six wide. Corners: 8-8.

REFEREE: John Brandwood, Lichfield. Had a poor game, with the worst aberration the failure to see Andy Edwards use his hands to clear down a cross by Harbson in the penalty area.

BOOKED: Gary Poole of Southend for holding back John Harbson. Julian James for the second time this season. Terry Hurlock, Ceri Hughes and David Greene, his third yellow card of the season, for an alleged foul on Sansome.

ATTENDANCE: 5,918, a drop of 1,600 on the gate when Southend went last here in the league.

ENTERTAINMENT: Awful for the first 40 minutes, when both sides looked Third Division, but exciting after the break, when Southend came back hard and either side might have won.

Big match facts

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HATTERS VIDEO COMPETITION

Snap up a super video

OUR competition to win copies of the Luton Town video, showing all 138 goals from their games last season, reaches the final whistle on Friday, so there is still time to enter.

The video runs for an hour, and we have two copies to give away in a simple competition which is free to enter.

The video shows every goal scored by the Town, and every one conceded, with the highlights the marvellous FA Cup run and the heroics of Scott Oakes.

Masochists can also suffer again the humiliating memories of losing to Cambridge in the Coca-Cola Cup.

But the season ended on a happy note, with a bailing draw at Stoke City, and Town fans will be more than happy to take this video to their sporting film library.

The price in the club shop is £18.99, but two lucky readers will have copies with the compliments of ourselves and Luton Town.

All you have to do is answer three questions which are:

1) Who scored the Town's first goal last season?

2) Who got the last one?

3) And who scored hat-tricks for the Town, and against whom?

List your answers on a postcard, or a sealed-down envelope, and send it to: Sports Desk (Competition), Luton News, Grosvenor House, Alma Street, Luton, LU1 2PL.

The closing date for entries is noon this Friday, and all correct entries will go into the Sports Desk's Wembley hat for two winners to be drawn out. Both will be notified.