

Hatters take sting out of Hornets

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By PETE KENYON

Watford 2 Luton 4

TOP Hatters finally found their goal-den boots to rip woeful Watford apart in a six-goal thriller.

Local police moved this fixture to a midday kick-off to avoid possible trouble, but the only tempers flaring at yesterday's derby were restricted to the pitch, David Preece and Andy Hessenthaler tangling on the floor just before the break with teammates joining in the scuffle.

After successive home defeats against Burnley and Bolton, both games they could and should have won, Luton bounced back in fine style. This was an almost unheard of second successive away win.

Yesterday it was the Hatters and not the Hornets who were buzzing - led from midfield by the impressive pairing of David

Preece and on-loan Gary Waddock.

But it wasn't until Watford went into the lead that David Pleat's men hit top gear, abandoning a five man defensive formation in favour of all-out attacking play which made the Hornets' defence look more rubble-like than the demolished terracing at one end of the pitch.

Within five minutes of Jamie Moralee's opener Hatters were level - Scott Oakes letting fly from 20 yards after debutant defender Gary Fitzgerald, just 17 and in for the injured Colin Foster, failed to clear.

Three minutes later Luton were in front after a move which swept the length of the field at lightning pace and had started as a Watford corner.

Speedy Dwight Marshall, who has injected pace into Luton's attack since his arrival from Plymouth, picked the ball up in his own half, raced away from the home defence, linked with Preece, and crossed for Kerry Dixon.

Andy Hessenthaler should have

cleared with ease, but only managed to find Dixon, who pounced gratefully on the chance for his first goal of the season.

Julian James and Marshall both had chances to extend the lead as Hatters found a rich vein of attacking form which so far this season has eluded them.

But at the back Luton were too often found wanting and the home side might have won themselves an undeserved point.

Juergen Sommer dropped a Jamie Porter cross at the edge of his own box, a howler similar to the one which gifted Burnley a 1-0 win at Kenilworth Road last week, and Moralee watched in despair as Hatters skipper Trevor Peake cleared his deliberate shot off the line.

Minutes later Luton had a two-goal cushion, courtesy of a fine solo effort from Paul Telfer.

Picking the ball up on the right edge of the box, he twisted past two defenders, checked, dummied first one way then the other and then launched an unstoppable

shot past the startled Perry Digweed.

But hardly had the celebrations died down when Watford threw themselves an unlikely lifeline just before the break, Tommy Moony taking full advantage of sloppy defending to fire his first goal for the club.

If the first half was thrilling, the second certainly wasn't. Watford, apart from a late Craig Ramage effort against the bar, were never able to trouble Sommer and Luton seemed content to shut their opponents out.

Nine minutes into the half it was virtually over as a contest.

Preece sent Marshall away down the left after a deft one-two and his inch-perfect near post cross picked out the only Hatter in the box, Telfer, who skilfully scooped the ball into the net first time from a tight angle.

After that Luton seemed to lose their way, but if they can recreate some of the fast breaking football they produced yesterday the goals, scant in recent weeks, may start to flow.