

Hatters are rejuvenated

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By PETER KENYON

Luton Town 3 Portsmouth 1

REJUVENATED Hatters gave their season a kickstart by murdering ten man Portsmouth and notching their first home win since April.

But Luton boss Terry Westley had to shepherd the referee Paul Rejer back to the dressing room at half time after his players looked to vent their anger over an appalling off-side decision which allowed Pompey a lifeline two minutes before the break.

Westley said after the game: "I was trying to get the players away from him. From where we were on the bench Walsh was absolutely miles offside.

"The linesman knew he had made a mistake by not raising his flag but wasn't brave enough to change his mind after the event."

Fortunately for the Hatters it mattered little to the end result - and by the time Jon Gittens had been sent for an early bath on the hour for a second bookable offence in one dramatic minute, Luton were already cruising at 3-1.

Fifty-nine minutes had gone when Gittens upended Dwight Marshall on the

left edge of the box as the pacy Jamaican threatened to go outside him in similar fashion to the way he had breezed past Fitzroy Simpson a split second earlier.

Bontcho Guentchev sent Alan Knight the wrong way to notch up his third goal of the season - all spot kicks - and kill off the south coast side.

When Gittens was sent off a minute after the penalty - for pulling down John Taylor on halfway as he looked all set for a clear run on goal - the damage had been done.

Marshall fired Hatters into a seventh minute lead - and but for Portsmouth's slice of luck just before the break it was one-way traffic.

Keeper Ian Feuer sent a low free kick into Pompey's half, an unchallenged Taylor, who faces a back operation next week, stooped to flick the ball through with his head and Marshall raced clear.

As Knight came out of goal, Marshall hit the ball first time on the bounce with the outside of his boot and steered it coolly just inside the post.

Bradbury should have equalised a minute later but Feuer spread himself well to snuff out the danger.

It was Bradbury again who should have done better after again finding good position on the left, only to ram the ball into the side-netting as Feuer raced to

narrow the angle.

From that moment it was all Hatters as the Endsleigh League whipping boys finally started to crack the whip themselves.

Guentchev should have done better after being put clear by Steve Davis, but seemed to lack the confidence to carry the ball forward and a split second's hesitation allowed Guy Butters time to rob him.

But with 23 minutes gone skipper Davis doubled the lead after Knight spilled a fierce 30 yard free kick from the boot of the Danish answer to Hamish Hotshot - Johnny Vilstrup.

The ball bounced back to Marshall who was forced wide by the recovering Knight, but just as the danger seemed to have past, Marshall cut inside and drove the ball across the six yard box where Davis was waiting to volley home from close range.

Taylor wasted a glorious opportunity after being allowed a free header from a corner, but overall despite carrying an obvious injury he played magnificently.

The ovation which greeted the final whistle must have been music to the ears of Westley.

Westley has announced he expects to replace him upfront next week with Danish striker Mark Strudel formerly of Brondby and Borussia Dortmund.