

Johnson raises Luton's sights

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By Peter Lansley

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THE bare facts suggest that in a mid-February neighbourly squabble, Second Division leaders Watford increased their advantage to four points even after allowing Luton to recover for a draw which kept them one point above the relegation places.

But in the surreal atmosphere activated by a noon kick-off on the warmest Valentine's Day in memory, Harry the Hornet rejected a pre-match proposal from the Oasis FM presenter out on the pitch — because Vicarage Road's resident mascot loves only Watford — and the programme featured visiting striker Tony Thorpe talking about Luton's play-off prospects.

The need for 250 police was a grim reminder of past troubles in this fixture but it all seemed rather early to be getting too excited. Certainly Watford, four goals up within half an hour at Kenilworth Road in October, took time to wipe the sleep from their eyes.

Paul Robinson's ill-judged pass invited David Oldfield to skip away but his shot was tame and Alec Chamberlain saved easily. Then the Watford goalkeeper, formerly in Luton's employ, was beaten by his own man as Robert Page headed past him and only inches wide of the gaping net.

Thorpe had a point-blank header saved from the corner and then weaved into the area before curling a left-footer beyond the upright. Watford stirred. Reality, with *Football Focus* finishing in the average supporter's front room, kicked in.

Richard Johnson's dinked pass was chested down by

Jason Lee and Robinson slotted in the second goal of his fledgling career. Surely now championship pedigree would hold sway. But Luton, undeterred by four successive League defeats, defied expectations 10 minutes from time.

With his back to goal, defender Marvin Johnson — five previous League goals in 11 years at Luton — stuck out his right leg at Paul McLaren's wayward shot. The ball changed direction and spun over the line..

The Second Division promotion scenario, previously deemed a walkover for Watford and Bristol City, could become rather more fun. Play-off aspirants Gillingham, having won at Vicarage Road last week, on Saturday beat second-placed City, who are now a mere 10 points ahead of the pack. Luton can do their dearest old enemy a favour next week as, with tails up, they host City.

Running up a 16-point advantage by Christmas has evidently provided the top two with the problem of sustaining their momentum. Certainly, Luton looked the more eager team at Vicarage Road. Perhaps the promotion places are not all sewn up. Stranger things have happened.

Watford: Chamberlain; Gibbs, Page, Millen, Palmer, Robinson; Slater (Noel-Williams 86), R Johnson, Hyde; Lee, Mooney. **Subs:** Ward, Lowndes. **Booked:** Lee, Page. **Goal:** Robinson 51.

Luton: Davis; Patterson, White, M Johnson (Davies 88), Thomas; Alexander, Waddock (Evers 71), McLaren, Allen (Marshall 71); Oldfield, Thorpe. **Booked:** McLaren, Thomas, Thorpe. **Goal:** Johnson 80.

Referee: J Kirkby (Sheffield).