

Hatters hit back for points

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By PETER KENYON
Luton 3 Tranmere 2

DWIGHT Marshall bagged a brace as Luton twice came from behind.

The little Jamaican also hit the bar twice and ran his socks off as Hatters finally hit the winning formula.

And while Terry Westley scours the country for a much needed striker he can take heart from the fact that perhaps - in Tony Thorpe - the missing link has been at Kenilworth Road all the while.

Thorpe, after looking all at sea against Norwich, got the Town's goal in a rare win at Southend and yesterday turned on the style. It was his deep cross which got Hatters level after falling behind in precisely two minutes and 25 seconds.

This after a two minute stoppage while Julian James was treated for a head wound. Tranmere won the drop ball re-start and Ian Moore sliced open a flat Luton backline.

As the defensive foursome raised their arms like a quartet of synchronized swimmers, Gary Bennett raced through, drew Ian Feuer and neatly steered his shot into the corner.

Jed Brennan had a viciously curling shot saved by Feuer and Hatters looked set to buckle.

Enter Tony Thorpe. On six minutes, it was his long chip which fell behind Tony Thomas, and as the left back tried to put off Marshall the No 8, with his back to goal, pivoted on the spot and struck a left foot volley beyond Danny Coyne.

Bennett then saw his point-blank effort magnificently saved by Feuer, playing in the last match of

his three-month loan spell from West Ham. For 25 minutes Hatters turned up the pressora, with Scott Oakes, Ceri Hughes, Richard Harvey and Thorpe playing the sort of one touch football which would have graced any Premiership pitch.

It was just a pity that only 6,025 spectators - Luton lowest gate of the season - were there to see it.

Oakes curled a shot just wide of the post with Coyne rooted to the spot before Marshall saw his delicate chip from 25 yards hit the top of the Tranmere bar.

But the promised score never came and seven minutes into the second half Tranmere were back in front with only their third serious effort on goal.

Bennett headed back across goal and an unmarked Gary Jones rose

to loop a header precise enough to beat even the grasp of six feet eight inch Feuer.

Julian James then made a crucial tackle as John Aldridge threatened to burst clear, and a minute later Moore missed a golden chance to seal the match for the visitors.

With Hatters once again vainly appealing on mass for offside, the little No 10 drew Feuer, but then screwed his shot agonisingly wide.

Two minutes later Tranmere paid the price for their generous Christmas spirit in front of goal.

Thorpe ran 30 yards with the ball and beat his man at the byline. His pull-back looked to be inadequate, but the clearance was only half made and Oakes hit a shot from the edge of the box.

For once luck was on Hatters' side and the mishit weak effort trickled through a ruck of players to the first-to-react Marshall, who just got his boot in ahead of the advancing Coyne to pop the ball over the keeper's body and into the centre of the net for the equaliser.

Harvey then had a magnificent left foot volley finger-tipped wide by Coyne, and Marshall was unlucky not to complete his hat-trick with a close range effort which cannoned back off the bar.

But barely a minute later, Oakes played an exquisite pass for Paul McLaren to run onto in the 'D' of the box.

McLaren's angled run took him clear of the last defender and with a cocky flick with the outside of his boot it was 3-2. What a time to score your first goal for the club, and didn't he know it as he raced round the pitch like a Formula 1 car of the same name.

Tranmere threw everything at Luton for the last ten minutes, but Hatters held firm for only their second home win of the season.



● Tony Thorpe



● Richard Harvey puts in a cross at Kenilworth Road yesterday