

No talk of money from Page

ROBERT Page was pulled out of the Welsh squad because the Hornets were so strapped for centre halves on Tuesday night. Some newspapers claimed that it had cost him £5,000.

"At the end of the day, that is my business. I can't believe that this got out into the newspapers," said the defender. "It has cost me money but money is not the most important thing at the moment."

● Playing as emergency centre half once again, Steve Palmer said: "It is a different position but I am happy to fill in there and do my best. We have had a good little run lately but we are very, very aware of what we have to do and even that might not be enough."

● Tommy Mooney said: "I am quite happy to let Rammy have his hat-trick. I put the willies up him by going for the ball on the line."

"I was hoping they were going to announce over the tannoy that I scored it because I would have been able to give him a little more stick but I'm happy for him to have it."

"Everyone was pleased that we had scored six because we needed to get on equal par with Portsmouth. We needed to score six and we are quite happy to know that if it does

Views from the dressing room

go to the wire, we do not have goals scored working against us.

"But no, I don't want to take a hat-trick opportunity away from Craig."

● For David Connolly, he is living "the ultimate dream".

"I was at Bushey Rangers and had strong associations with Watford. I was watching them and now to be out there, scoring goals and hearing the crowd chant your name, this is the ultimate dream."

"I thought my chance had gone with the bad luck I have had. I'm not sure that I didn't score seven in four games for the juniors but to do it in the first team is something else. That is where it counts."

"I think, being a local lad, it means more to me but I don't think anyone wants to see this club go down."

● "We were happy with the result. The two lads have got a hat-trick and I am happy to have played a part in a couple of the goals," said Devon White.

"I always feel that I need to be used a lot and knock the ball off,

harass and hustle for the ball and even score goals at times.

"The problem was that we did not have any out-and-out wingers and they said there was no point in putting me up there. Well the situation has not changed but I am getting plenty of the ball and I am laying it off and I feel I am doing quite well."

"We were 4-1 up at half time and the gaffer said we had to get two more to be on terms with Portsmouth. That set us a target."

● Gary Porter admitted that the Hornets have been living on their nerves. "It will certainly put the wind up the other teams but I think the main thing is that we are winning these games. The idea is to score more goals than the opposition and this is what we have done."

"Graham Taylor is bringing back a lot of things from before. They are basic principles. Supporters want to see exciting football, goalmouth incidents, crosses and shots."

"It is not going to happen overnight. It is the tightest corner we have been in. In the past, we have had to win this or that game to get out of trouble. This time, we still have to win but hope that a couple of other results go our way."

Early cluster of cards left derby throttled and lifeless

DERBY games, as with watching England, are greeted with anticipation and passion but, in recent years, they invariably disappoint.

Saturday's turgid, haphazard exchange, dominated by nerves and over-zealous refereeing, was no exception.

The ludicrous succession of yellow cards not only stamped down on the intended target, the potential for venom, but also anaesthetised the passion. As a result, we were left with anxious, error-ridden industry and stifling exchanges as both teams cancelled each other out and, in doing so, cut each other's throat.

There was no lack of application but the belief that had begun to pulse through Watford's collective veins earlier in the week, was absent. Crosses from either side were at a premium and it is hard to remember just one of that handful of centres causing the keepers any problems.

For the unbiased onlooker, this must have seemed like the battle of the doomed, for certainly it contained all the elements of such a meeting. This truly was an exchange between two teams of players who had their hearts in the right place but lacked the quality and confident competence to overturn their opponents.

Kim Grant had perhaps the only clear-cut chance of the game, breaking clear shortly after the interval, and then squandering the opportunity.

For Watford, Devon White had a couple of half-chances but his shooting lacked conviction and failed to really test the Luton keeper.

Seventeen-year-old Darren Ward found himself pitched into the heart of the defence. Instead of featuring in the Hornets' South-East Counties win at Cambridge, he made the shorter trip to Kenilworth Road and

about that.

"As a derby, the passion, the do-or-die wasn't there for 90 minutes. It showed its head now and then but not throughout."

Asked about the decision to promote a first year YTS ahead of a second-year, Blissett said: "Darren Ward got the vote. He is a centre half and has been doing extremely well in the youth team and that is why he got the vote ahead of Mark Rooney."

"In the main, he did not do badly but the timing of his attacking the ball in the air, could have been better."

"You can't wait at this level, whereas you can probably do that in the South-East Counties League."

Andrews' second-half hat-trick

A SECOND-half hat-trick by Wayne Andrews steered Watford Juniors to a 4-1 victory at Cambridge on Saturday.

Chris JOHNSON scored the first direct from a free kick taken at the edge of the box to give the young Hornets a 1-0 interval lead.

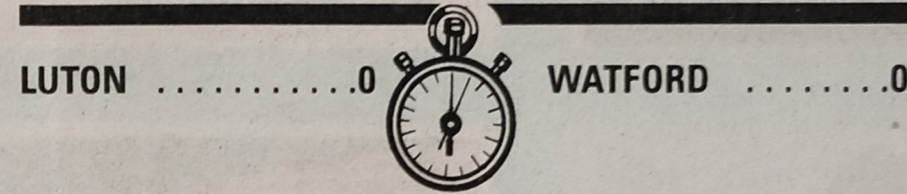
ANDREWS then weighed in with a second-half hat-trick.

The first was a header after a very good run down the left and a cross from Paul Robinson. The second was scored controversially after

Jackett's Juniors

Gifton Noel-Williams had slid in for a 50-50 challenge with the keeper.

Both players were hurt but the referee did not blow for a foul and, as both players lay there waiting for treatment, the keeper pushed the ball away. ANDREWS duly tapped home and the referee awarded a goal much to United's annoyance, particularly as the keeper and Noel-Williams left the field as a result of



■ LUTON TOWN: Feuer; Alexander, Thomas, Johnson, Davis, Patterson, Guentchev, Thorpe, Oldfield, Grant, Oakes. Substitutes: Tomlinson for Oldfield after 71 mins; Harvey for Thorpe after 84 mins; James not used.

■ WATFORD: Miller; Ward, Palmer, Ludden; Bazeley, Hesselthaler, Ramage, Porter, Mooney; Connolly, White. Substitutes: Moralee for Connolly after 45 mins; Payne for Porter after 76 mins; Rooney not used.

■ DATE: 20-4-96.

■ ATTENDANCE: 9,454, Watford contingent: 1,936 (two arrested in ground).

■ REFEREE: George Cain (Liverpool) spoilt the chance of this game ever rising above the level of the nervous.

■ ENTERTAINMENT VALUE: Negligible.

■ CLEAR-CUT CHANCES: Watford 1, Luton 1.

■ WATFORD'S MEN OF THE MATCH: Palmer, Ludden, Hesselthaler.

■ SHARE OF PLAY: Watford 50 per cent.

■ ASSISTS: None.

■ CONDITIONS: Rough pitch, very hot.

■ FREE-KICKS - total (for offside): Watford 14 (4), Luton 21 (2).

■ CORNERS: Watford 2, Luton 8.

■ GOAL-ATTEMPTS on-target (off-target): Watford 8 (5), Luton 3 (12).

■ WATFORD GOAL-ATTEMPTS BY: White 4, Ramage 2, Mooney 2, Hesselthaler 1, Bazeley 1, Moralee 1, Porter 1, Payne 1.

■ DESERVED RESULT: A draw.

■ BOOKINGS: Ramage for ungentlemanly conduct after four mins; White for dissent after six mins; Hesselthaler for a foul on Thorpe after 25 mins; Moralee for a foul after 82 mins; Payne for a foul after 86 mins; Oldfield for a foul on Mooney after five mins; Alexander for a foul on Mooney after nine mins; Oakes for ungentlemanly conduct after 35 mins; Davis for a foul on Ludden after 42 mins; Patterson for a foul on Ramage after 82 mins; Alexander for ungentlemanly conduct after 89 mins - Sent Off for second bookable.

The big match

by Oliver Phillips

celebrated his first-team debut with a fair display. Stunned by the pace of the exchanges in the first 10 minutes when he was "sweating buckets", as he admitted later, Ward gave a good account of himself alongside Watford's man of the match Steve Palmer.

In the end, local honour was maintained, neither side having lost to the other over the two meetings. Yet it was probably at home to Luton earlier this season, when Ramage missed a penalty and, more significantly, Penrice sustained the

injury, which has dogged him ever since, that Watford began to slide towards the Second Division.

It is a sad commentary on Saturday's fixture, that events from the earlier meeting between the two sides, are more easily remembered. This game contained hardly a moment worth savouring and the 11 bookings will probably remain the only item to be recalled in years to come.

I am all for referee's taking a firm hold on proceedings but this official throttled the life out of the game. He made no allowances for the passion evinced by a local derby or the concern over the sides' respective positions.

Instead he seemed overawed by these factors, as if believing that the game would run away from him if he did not stamp, stamp again and then consistently reaffirm his authority.

To send off a home player seconds from time in a local derby for what was purely a technical offence and barely worthy of a second booking, was not the most politic of moves. Fortunately, although both sets of fans were in good voice throughout, the stalemate of the exchanges seemed to have knocked the heart and emotion out of the more Neanderthal elements. Instead of a riot, we had the acceptance that neither side was good enough to overcome the other.

Somehow the passion of those

respective banks of supporters deserved a better spectacle as Luton enjoyed their biggest gate of the season in that unlovely collection of afterthoughts they call a stadium.

The sun was out, the sky was blue but there was a cloud to spoil the view, the inability to penetrate the opposition. In this, Luton were probably the more painfully inadequate. So clearly the biggest struggles in front of goal with just 36 nettings to show in 42 games, they should have made more impact against a very obviously makeshift Watford defence.

The Hornets, whose recent goal-glut has inched them towards the relatively respectable total of 54 goals, rarely looked like puncturing the home defence.

Individually, there was no shortage of application. Connolly worked tremendously hard, chasing back 50 yards to his own goalline on occasions and there was no shortage of commitment from the likes of White, Porter, Bazeley and Ramage. Hesselthaler, who had a ferocious battle with Johnson, came out on top by the end and Ludden did well on occasions. Palmer and Ward had an excellent afternoon in what for them were unfamiliar surroundings and Mooney again demonstrated why he is among the the front-runners in the Player of the Season stakes.

But really, what was the referee thinking of, booking so many and so early? He set such a standard for applying the letter of the law that he was on course for showing at least one red card before the interval. Happily the penny appeared to have dropped for he allowed Hesselthaler three fouls as bad as the ones the referee had booked players for earlier in the game, before finally showing the Watford skipper the yellow card.

The official's contribution doomed a game already likely to be balanced on a knife-edge. The occasion, the standing of the two teams and the rivalry meant that everyone was afraid of making a mistake. The referee provided them with an extra reason for unease.

The first half was very forgettable apart the growing prospect of the referee's homework. Neither side

was able to find enough time and room in which to bring the ball down and construct a thoughtful move.

In the hustle and bustle of the exchanges, there were more interruptions by the referee's yellow cards than there was cause to enter goalmouth incidents in our notebooks.

Guentchev sent a free kick over the target and when Miller came out and delayed a clearance, mis-kicking as a result, Grant had the visiting troops in a flurry as he lobbed towards the empty goal but, fortunately for Watford, he just cleared the target.

When Grant headed back following a set-piece, Guentchev had a half-chance but he was falling backwards as he reached the ball and nodded over.

When White headed down, Ramage sent an overhead kick wide and the lanky Watford striker also provided Feuer with a formality save with a shot coming in from the left.

Moralee came on for Connolly after the break and did well breaking from a deeper position but when Watford attempted to exert some pressure following a corner, they were caught ball-watching. Oakes found Grant with a pass to send him clear.

Ludden battled back with a tackle to upset the Luton man's momentum but the ball was knocked forward and Grant took it wide of the diving Miller and then lashed the ball into the side-netting as if not appreciating he had time at his disposal.

Johnson found Miller with a low, deflected shot and, following a mis-clearance by Ward, Thorpe went in but shot well wide of the target.

Then Porter clipped the ball to White but he topped his final shot and was to do likewise when Hesselthaler played him in late in the game. His side-foot effort lacked power and the keeper was able to drop on it.

Mooney forced the keeper to save with a header to a Bazeley free kick and when Ramage played in Mooney, he cut inside and opted for a right-footed shot, striking the ball low but wide.

‘What was the referee thinking of, booking so many and so early?’