

# Thorpe strikes to put Luton back on course

96/97

Martin Searby

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|-------------------|----------|
| <b>Burnley</b>    | <b>0</b> |
| <b>Luton Town</b> | <b>2</b> |

LUTON came out on top by a wider margin than the scoreline indicates despite a bristling late response by Burnley. Tony Thorpe enhanced his reputation with two more goals to take his total to 23 in the League, totally eclipsing Paul Barnes, scorer of two hat-tricks this season in his tally of 22.

Two clubs who have known better times are trying to claw their way back up football's pyramid in some style, netting more goals than anyone else in the division and fielding the two leading scorers in Thorpe, 22, and Barnes, 29.

Luton came into the game in the middle of a lean spell with only one win in six games while Burnley had won four in a seven-match unbeaten run. To add to the Hatters' woes, they were without the influential Ceri Hughes and Darren Patterson, on international duty, could boast only two victories in 17 previous visits to the now magnificently rebuilt Turf Moor ground and had not won any of their last five away matches.

Both have known better times — Luton plummeted from the First to the Fourth Division in five years, taking another two decades to climb

back to the top flight and a best-ever placing of seventh in 1987, the year Burnley were only a point away from the Vauxhall Conference and, to all intents and purposes, oblivion.

The loss of the two midfielders did not appear to be too much of a handicap with the combative Gary Waddock and Paul McLaren giving Burnley's Paul Weller and Steve Thompson a hard time. Luton almost drew first blood when Weller hit a powerful shot from a good opening but Marlon Beresford saved well. Ian Feuer, formerly of West Ham, had to be equally acrobatic to save from Andy Cooke in an open contest where both sides were prepared to attack.

Luton took the lead when McLaren turned the ball back to Graham Alexander some 20 yards out — when his shot squirmed off a defender to the right Thorpe took careful aim and fired home his 22nd league goal into the far corner to make light of Luton's recent form and history.

Thorpe, much more than just a goal poacher, showed vision and skill throughout. After cleverly turning inside a marker to win a corner, he was on hand to head in the resulting kick from a flick by Mitchell Thomas; Burnley contested the linesman's decision that the ball had crossed the line.

For all their encouraging recent form, Burnley were mostly second best in all departments and Barnes and Cooke hardly got a look in against Steve Davis, once captain at Turf Moor, and Marvin Johnson, two imposing central defenders.

When Damian Matthew played a neat through ball at the start of the second half, Barnes, instead of using his pace to beat Thomas, opted to suggest he was impeded and another of the increasingly rare chances went begging. Burnley may yet reach the First Division via the play-offs but Luton look a better bet for promotion. It would be good to see both back in football's higher reaches.

**Burnley:** Beresford; Parkinson, Smith, Brass, Holland (Little, 81), Winstanley, Matthew, Weller, Cooke, Barnes, Thompson (Guinan, 73).

**Luton Town:** Feuer; McGowan (Guentchev, 81), Thomas, Waddock, Davis, Johnson, McLaren, Alexander, Oldfield, Thorpe, Kiwomya (Marshall, 64).

**Referee:** T Jones (Barrow in Furness).