DAVE FLETT REPORTS: THE HATTERS LOOK A BETTER BET FOR PROMOTION AS THE AL FAYED FINANCED FULHAM

Brave Hatters battl for point!

FULHAM	0
HATTERS	0

● PULLING POWER: Midfielder Simon Davies is hauled back by Fulham defender Robbie Herrera.

IN A game that promised goals from the start but ultimately failed to deliver any, the Hatters were unlucky to come away from Fulham's Craven Cottage with just a point.

Lennie Lawrence was again forced to reshuffle his pack, as star striker Tom Thorpe joined Ian Feuer on the sidelines with a slight thigh strain.

Thorpe's injury scare was taken by the fit-again David Oldfield, who was unexpectedly called in at the last minute by coach Kelvin Davies from his loan period at Hartlepool just in time for him to take his position between the sticks.

Understandably, there was further bad news for the Hatters when, in an incident typical of their recent luck, Graham Alexander, injury-free since missing the club in 1995, had to limp off, with a torn hamstring in only the 13th minute.

Paul McLaren replaced Alexander and went on to produce a good all-action performance, while forging a strong partnership with skipper Gary Waddock in the middle of the park.

As in previous games, Lawrence was reliant on replacements coming in and delivering the goods on the spot and, in this matter, Kelvin Davies led the way.

Having not played in a League game all last season, he was to be an exclusive guest, for the talented 20-year old sub-stopper. As early as the fifth minute, he was called into action, when ex-Wimbledon striker Aidan Newhouse broke the offside trap to race clear and strike a firm effort low to Davies' left. The young keeper responded in the manner required of him, producing an excellent save to turn the ball around the post. Mysteriously, the referee awarded a goal-kick.

That decision proved to be only the first of a series of mind-boggling decisions by the man in black, Mr Pierce, and, somehow, four Hatters players Mitchell Thomas, Steve Davis, Dwight Marshall and Paul McLaren wrote all shown yellow cards in what was generally an evenly-tempered encounter. Two home players also had their names taken in a prime example of overzealous refereeing.

LENNIE'S VIEW

Hatters boss Lennie Lawrence said:

We had a lot of the ball around their goal in the first half but didn't really make enough of it. In the second half, we played well on the counter-attack and they didn't really look like scoring. We finished strongest and, if anybody was going to win it was going to be us.

Having passed his early test of character, Davies went on to put in an assured performance, and a great nod pulled off two further top drawer saves to deny Fulham's Steve Hayward and Mark Conroy in the first half.

It was by no means one way traffic however, with the Hatters enjoying their moments in a free-flowing first period.

Gary Waddock headed wide a promising header in only the second minute and it was his through ball shortly afterwards that saw a Marshall goal-bound effort diverted to safety by an opposition defender, after Simon Davies had squandered the better chance earlier by delaying his shot.

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The Hatters were unlucky to be only the first of a series of mind-boggling decisions by the Jamaican international keeper, Maitland-Niles, who opens the scoring when he collides with keeper, Mark Walton, in a manner that somewhere, Walton flung his arms and legs and last second to grab the ball.

After the interval, the Hatters dominate the pace, with the home side, a large somewhat jittering on, to no more heroics required of Davies and both Stuart Douglas and Marshall close to putting the visitors ahead.

The spring heeled Douglas stretched for a diving header from Thomas' free down that Walton pushed behind for a corner in the 54th minute and then, two minutes later, the home keeper was at it stretch again, to keep out a long Marshall header from Dave Saunders' cross.

Douglas was substituted around hour mark and, although he lacks the heights he had last Monday in the of the Sky cameras, he has enough to justify his place in the starting line-up.

The only fault that could be laid at the teenager's whole-hearted performance, was the ease, at times, with he was wrestled to the ground, on times fairly sometimes unfairly by opposition defenders, a lesson he might find common in the unsympathetic world of Division Two.

With Douglas' departure, the McGowan was employed in a right field role, and Marshall was pushed out to forward centre-forward spot. Never, it at turned out, the best chances of the game for the visitors had already been taken and missed.

On the other end, the Hatters defence looked almost impenetrable, with Simon Johnson and Steve Davis in superb form in helm of a well-disciplined and well-focussed display.

There was one last scare for the home side in the 83rd minute though, when Paul Hall' Danny Collig could and should have scored with a well-placed header, but that would have been more nice on a Hatters side that were more the good value for their point.

As for newly-promoted Fulham, their supremo Mohamed Al Fayed, who has injected £70 million into the West London outfit but, on this evidence and, at this stage, the Hatters looked a more finished sound investment.

In fact, the only evidence on Saturday Al Fayed's new empire was the silver boards bearing the name of his Knightsbridge department store in the popped at regular intervals around the perimeter of the pitch.

His son might be fraternising with royalty, but this was, by no stretch, a performance fit for a king.

TEAMS: Hatters

Julian James, Mitchell Thomas, Gary Waddock, Steve Davis, Martin Ling, Simon Davies (Richard Harvey, 72), Graham Alexander (Paul McLaren), David Oldfield, Stuart Douglas (Sean McGowan, 61), Dwight Marshall.

Fulham: Mark Walton, Matthew Lawrence, Robbie Herrera, Simon Collins, Neil Smith, Paul Bonsor, Aidan Newhouse, Steve Hayward, Mark Conroy (Rob Scott, 72), Sean Maitland-Niles (Rob McAvoy, 61), Richard Carpenter (Glenn Cockerill, 72).

● FLOORED AGAIN: Teenage striker Stuart Douglas was given little leeway from an uncompromising home defence. This time Matthew Lawrence puts the boot in.

● MAN IN BLACK: Referee Mike Pierce played a prominent role all afternoon, booking six players in a somewhat over zealous display.

● STOOPING TO CONQUER: Stuart Douglas sees a diving header pushed behind for a corner.

Pictures: Gareth Owen

LUTON TOWN FC 1997-98 THE FULL STORY

August	Opponents	Score	Scorers	Att	Pos
Sat 9	Blackpool	0-1		6,547	-
Lge Cup	Colchester (2/C1)	1-0	Thorpe 87	2,142	-
Sat 16	SOUTHEND	1-0	Douglas 75	7,482	-
Sat 23	Fulham	0-0		8,142	15
Sat 30	OLDHAM	H			
September					
Lges 2	WALSALL	H	7.45		
Sat 6	Northampton	A	3		
Sat 13	Bournemouth	A	3		
Sat 20	WREXHAM	H	3		
Sat 27	Bristol City	A	3		
October					
Sat 4	WATFORD	H	3		
Sat 11	PLYMOUTH ARG	H	3		
Sat 18	Wigan Athletic	A	3		
Lges 21	Carlisle United	H	7.45		
Sat 25	BRENTFORD	H	3		
November					
Sat 1	Wycombe	A	3		
Lges 4	Burnley	H	7.45		
Sat 8	PRESTON	H	3		
Sat 15	FA Cup 1				
Lges 18	Grimsby	A	7.45		
Sat 22	WALSALL	H	3		
Sat 29	York City	H	3		
December					
Lges 2	GILLINGHAM	H	7.45		
Sat 6	Northampton	A	3		
Sat 20	BRISTOL ROVERS	H	3		
Sat 26	NORTHAMPTON	A	3		
Sun 28	Millwall	A	3		
January					
Sat 9	Southend (FAC 3)	A	3		
Sat 10	BLACKPOOL	H	3		
Sat 17	Oldham	A	3		
Sat 24	FULHAM	H	3		
Sat 31	BOURNEMOUTH	H	3		
February					
Lges 3	Wigan	A	7.45		
Sat 7	Wrexham	A	3		
Sat 14	Watford	A	3		
Sat 21	BRISTOL CITY	H	3		
Lges 24	WIGAN	H	7.45		
Sat 28	Plymouth Arg	A	3		
March					
Sat 7	WYCOMBE	H	3		
Sat 14	Burnley	A	3		
Sat 21	GRIMSBY	H	3		
Sat 28	Walsall	A	3		
April					
Sat 4	YORK CITY	H	3		
Sat 11	Gillingham	A	3		
Lges 14	CHESTERFIELD	A	3		
Sat 18	Bristol Rovers	A	3		
Sat 25	Brentford	A	3		
May					
Sat 2	CARLISLE	H	3		

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NATIONWIDE LEAGUE DIVISION TWO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Watford	3	3	0	0	7	0	9
Chesterfield	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Bristol Rovers	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Oldham	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Bournemouth	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Fulham	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Gillingham	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Wigan Athletic	3	1	2	0	3	1	5
Wycombe Wdrs	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Bristol City	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Preston North End	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Wrexham	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Southend	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
Northampton Town	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
LUTON TOWN	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Millwall	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Plymouth Argyle	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Walsall	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Grimsby Town	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Blackpool	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Walsall	3	0	1	2	1	6	1
Carlisle United	3	0	1	2	1	6	1
Brentford	3	0	1	2	1	6	1
Burnley	3	0	1	2	1	7	1

APPEARANCES & GOALS

Player	Appearances Sub	Goals Lge	Lge Cup	Lge Cup
Graham Alexander	10/0	0/0	0	0
Kelvin Davies	10/0	0/0	0	0
Simon Davies	10/0	0/0	0	0
Steve Davis	10/0	0/0	0	0
Stuart Douglas	2/1	1/0	0	0
Ian Feuer	2/0	0/0	0	0
Andrew Foreman	1/0	0/0	0	0
Richard Harvey	1/0	0/0	0	0
Julian James	10/0	0/0	0	0
Martin Ling	10/0	0/0	0	0
Dwight Marshall	10/0	0/0	0	0
Gavin McGowan	11/1	0/0	0	0
Paul McLaren	10/0	0/0	0	0
David Oldfield	10/0	0/0	0	0
Danny Collig	3/0	1/0	0	0
Tom Thorpe	3/0	1/0	0	0
Gary Waddock	10/0	0/0	0	0

BAD BOYS

Player	Yellow Cards	Red Cards
Steve Davis	1	0
Dwight Marshall	1	0
Paul McLaren	1	0
Mitchell Thomas	1	0
Gary Waddock	1	0
Totals	5	0

STAR TURNS

STEVE DAVIS was Hatter's star man against Fulham where he proved a calming influence in a back four that has not conceded a goal in 330 minutes of football.

MAN OF the MATCH

Player	MoM
Steve Davis	3
Gavin McGowan	1
Mitchell Thomas	1
Totals	5

● Paul McLaren was one of four Hatters players to pick up yellow cards in a yellow cards of the season at Fulham.

● Gavin McGowan was Man of the Match against Blackpool on the first day of the season.