

'The Town bench was attacked, Lawrence was threatened and the dugout thumped'



● It's there: Watford's third goal goes in, courtesy of the rampant Kennedy.

Arrests galore on derby day...



Frustration shows as this Luton Town fan invades the pitch

LUTON TOWN 0
WATFORD 4
BY BILL COLE

THERE is nothing like a passionate pulsating local derby full of battling football. The problem for Luton was that all the football in a decisive first half came from Watford and the passion and battling from moronic Hatters fans in the main stand.

Watching their fragile defence cave in at the slightest threat of a Hornets' attack, there was trouble in the crowd and a riot on the cards after the first goal went in as early as the fifth minute.

And there were several later attempts to run on the pitch and stop proceedings.

Police said afterwards that arrests and evictions were counted in "tens of people rather than the hundreds".

At one point the Town bench was attacked, Lawrence was threatened and the dugout thumped by supporters' fists as emotions ran high.

It all started so promisingly for the Hatters. They camped out in the visitors' half, their midfield bossing things.

But that changed dramatically with Watford's first attack. The Town defence were drawn to former Hatter Ronny Rosenthal like a moth to a flame and with his back to goal the shrewd Israeli international laid the ball off for the incoming Richard Johnson to skim a daisy cutter past Kelvin

Davis through a forest of legs. Watford were rampant. Davis had to be on his toes to come out to the edge of his area to deny Rosenthal after he got the better of Bryan Small.

Tormented, Paul McLaren and Gavin McGowan were booked in quick succession and from the free kick given for McGowan's indiscretion Watford grabbed a vital second goal.

Small should have cleared a hopeful ball six yards out, but left it to his goalkeeper and allowed David Thomas to get a shot in at point blank range.

Davis got his body in the way, but Thomas was first to the rebound and netted with glee whipping off his shirt and wheeling back to the centre circle, incurring the displeasure of his manager in celebrating his first goal for the club.

Small redeemed himself on 26 minutes when he slid in to deny Stewart Slater at the near post giving away a corner in the process.

Davis had to tip the first corner kick over, but the second was never properly cleared. The Town defence was found wanting once again, panicking when they had chances to clear and when Thomas miskicked Peter Kennedy pounced for Watford's third.

Two minutes later the same man made it four when he picked up a poor square pass from Luton's midfield, ran on and buried a shot to Davis's left.

It looked like worse was to come before the half hour when McLaren, already booked, made a rash challenge for the ball and when the free kick was awarded prevented it being taken quickly. Inexplicably with the crowd boiling in front of him the referee took his book from his pocket and showed the yellow card to Tony Thorpe.

And Watford could have made it five but

Mr Heilbron took pity on Alan White's desperate challenge from behind on Rosenthal and did not give the certain penalty to the visitors.

At the half Lennie Lawrence brought on Julian James for McGowan and Stewart Douglas for the ineffectual Simon Davies and the Town tightened up.

No doubt Watford took their foot off the pedal which allowed the home side to get their breath back. Indeed, they improved to the point where Thorpe forced a good save from Chamberlain after a mazy run just after the hour mark and Richard Harvey hit a good long shot straight at the Hornets' goalkeeper.

On 68 minutes they should have had the penalty too when Thorpe, struggling to get through just inside the area, was prevented by Robert Page, who had two handfuls of his shirt.

Thorpe later hit a shot high and wide when played through into acres of space by the battling Phil Gray.

At the death, Davis had to produce a fine save to deny Johnson a second goal and Luton could have had the last laugh but Gray's hook shot went just over when he was well found by David Oldfield.

This was Watford's first win over Luton in 10 years. The result leaves Luton second from bottom, one point ahead of Burnley.

At the end of this thrashing with Luton's defence verging on the Pythonesque at times, Luton's public address announcer at least kept his sense of humour by playing "Always look on the bright side of life."

Luton Town: Kelvin Davis 6/10, Gavin McGowan (Julian James 45 mins) 5, Richard Harvey 6, Gary Waddock 7, Bryan Small 5, Alan White 5, Phil Gray 6, Paul McLaren 6, David Oldfield 6, Tony Thorpe 6, Simon Davies (Stewart Douglas 45) 6.



● **BOOKED:** Tony Thorpe gets a yellow card

Lawrence hits back

BEFORE the game the crowd would have accepted anything as long as it was close but we shot ourselves in the foot and contributed to our own downfall.

The most illuminating aspect of the second half was the improvement that the experienced Julian James brought to the back four. He looked like an international out there and marshalled the line really well.

If people want to bang on the dugout and want to give you stick, as a football manager in 1997 you have to accept that. But it is not going to affect me because I have been at it too long but I love it here and I want to see us get out of trouble but we desperately need some of our experienced players back.

LENNIE LAWRENCE