



● It's there: David Oldfield fires a pumped-up Hatters in front (above left), then celebrates in suitable fashion (above right) during the 1-1 draw at Wigan Athletic yesterday.

■ Wigan cheer: Cock-a-hoop Lawrence has only two words to describe his battling Town:

The Professionals!

Wigan Athletic 1

Luton Town 1

By **BILL COLE**

IN this first league fixture between these two clubs, the Hatters had more regulars back after injury but were missing Gary Waddock.

However, they continued their revival. Indeed, they dominated almost all this game against big-spending Wigan and really deserved all three points.

They suffered a couple of strange refereeing decisions in the 72nd minute. A goal in front, a vastly-improved Town defence were all at sea when Graeme Jones ran at them and just when he looked sure to score, welcome returnee Steve Davis caused him to tumble.

Mr Messiah waved away huge appeals for a penalty but did award a spot kick seconds later when Roberto Martinez fell dramatically right on the

edge of the area. Graeme Jones duly converted the present with ease.

Wigan started the brighter of the two teams and should have taken a second-minute lead.

With Luton's new defensive line still introducing themselves, Jones tricked Bryan Small out on the wing, cut inside, turning Alan White in the process, and found himself in the clear ten yards out.

Luckily for the Town, he topped his shot and Kelvin Davis saved easily enough down to his left.

After that Athletic simply did not put another threatening move together in the half. Luton got their passing game working but failed to take a decisive lead by the break. A combination of poor final passes and lack of control inside the area let them down.

Tony Thorpe produced a right-wing cross that led to a Phil Gray header and Paul McLaren shot being blocked.

Then Steve Davis had a Graham Alexander free-kick nudged off his head when coming in on it like a train.

A neutral would have thought Luton by far the higher placed of these sides,



● No way, ref! Steve Davis disputes the penalty

and at home, they looked so much in charge.

Bryan Small wasted a good opportunity with 22 minutes gone when he crossed behind a host of Town shirts in the area, but amends on the half-hour when he produced a superb cross from the byline.

Gray could not get a full touch on it, and Alexander's follow up shot flew just over Lee Butler's bar. And

Alexander had a shot saved when he produced a low drive after a determined run down the middle.

Wigan started the second half with a missed chance. David Lowe played on side by Bryan Small was right through on the Luton goal but shot wide in the first minute.

But again Luton took over. Gray, well fed by Matthew Spring, failed to get a shot in, Alexander shot straight at Butler and a superb Phil Gray dummy let in Thorpe, whose goalbound shot was magnificently saved by Butler.

A double substitution brought on former Hatter Gavin Johnson and Paul Warne for Wigan in place of Lowe and David Lee but it was Luton who went in front on 67 minutes.

A lovely one-two between Thorpe and David Oldfield ended with Oldfield picking his spot. With the goalkeeper and two defenders on the line Oldfield coolly side-footed a beauty just inside the far post to crown a good performance from the Aussie.

Wigan rallied after that and looked a match for the Hatters for the first time. They equalised with that penalty and

forced Small to produce two saving headers to keep that deserved point after two defenders Colin Greenall for Athletic and Steve Davis for Luton had hit the Springfield Park woodwork with vicious long shots.

Lennie Lawrence said afterwards: "This was a big step forward, Wigan usually score a lot of goals here. You can't defend too deep against them and we resolved to take the game to them — our most professional performance of the season."

On the penalty Lawrence said: "I feel that the first one was just about the most blatant you would see and the second decision highly dubious but on balance we had no quarrel with the referee."

Team: Kelvin Davis 8/10, Julian James 8, Bryan Small 7, Matthew Spring 8 (Simon Davis 80) 7, Steve Davis 9, Alan White 7, Phil Gray 7 (Dwight Marshall 73) 7, Paul McLaren 8, David Oldfield 9, Tony Thorpe 7, Graham Alexander 8. Subs not used: Gary Doherty.

Attendance 4466.