

Money proves the answer for Fulham

97/98

Luton 1 Fulham 4

By Pete Kenyon

BIG-SPENDING Fulham proved chequebook football is every bit as effective as chequebook journalism.

The West London side's six million pound collection of Premiership rejects – eight of them in all – were ahead for all but 38 seconds of yesterday's pulsating Kenilworth Road encounter.

Were Bristol City and Watford not so far ahead of the rest of the pack, owner Muhammed Al Fayed's multi-million pound bid to buy the Second Division title would surely be successful.

But some cash is better than no cash – who at impoverished Luton Town could disagree? And Hatters were made to look like cut-price bargains from a Harrods sale.

The visitors were even able to afford the luxury of an appalling open-goal miss by their latest recruit – £600,000 Wayne Collins from Sheffield Wednesday.

But to give Luton their credit, they had Fulham in all sorts of trouble during a courageous first hour.

Despite falling behind to a Paul Moody effort inside the first minute – then having to reorganise after Alan White was stretchered off in agony following a 50-50 challenge with the same player a minute later – it was Luton who looked the classier of the two sides for long periods of an end-to-end first half feast.

Chris Allen fired a blistering drive inches wide of £700,000 ex-Southampton keeper, Maik Taylor's post on 13 minutes, David Oldfield hit the upright after a lovely turn and shot eight minutes later, and Allen missed a glorious chance to lob the hopelessly stranded Taylor seven minutes from the break.

But like so often at home this season, the chances went begging, and against the run of play, and from nowhere, Moody headed home ex-Sunderland player, Paul Bracewell's cross from point-blank range.

Once again Ian Feuer froze inside his own six-yard box – and for most of the afternoon was made to suffer the indignity of Fulham supporters' jibes of 'dodgy keeper'.

Time and again Feuer committed boobs of double-D cup proportions, and it cannot be long before the woefully out-of-form giant American is dropped.

Two minutes before the break Tony Thorpe gave Hatters a lifeline with his 18th goal of the season, sending Taylor the wrong way after a teasing pass from Paul McLaren.

Dramatic

And in injury time, Steve Davis came within an ace of grabbing an equaliser as Hatters camped out in Fulham's box.

But any notion of a dramatic comeback was stopped dead in its tracks nine minutes into the second period – and once again Feuer must shoulder the blame.

The troubled keeper had time to collect a ball and dribble it back inside his box, but instead gave away possession by hashing an awful clearance to halfway.

Fulham worked the ball across to the left wing and Paul Trollope's shot was somewhat harshly adjudged by the referee to have been



● On target: Tony Thorpe eludes the Fulham defence to collect Luton's goal

stopped by Darren Patterson's hand.

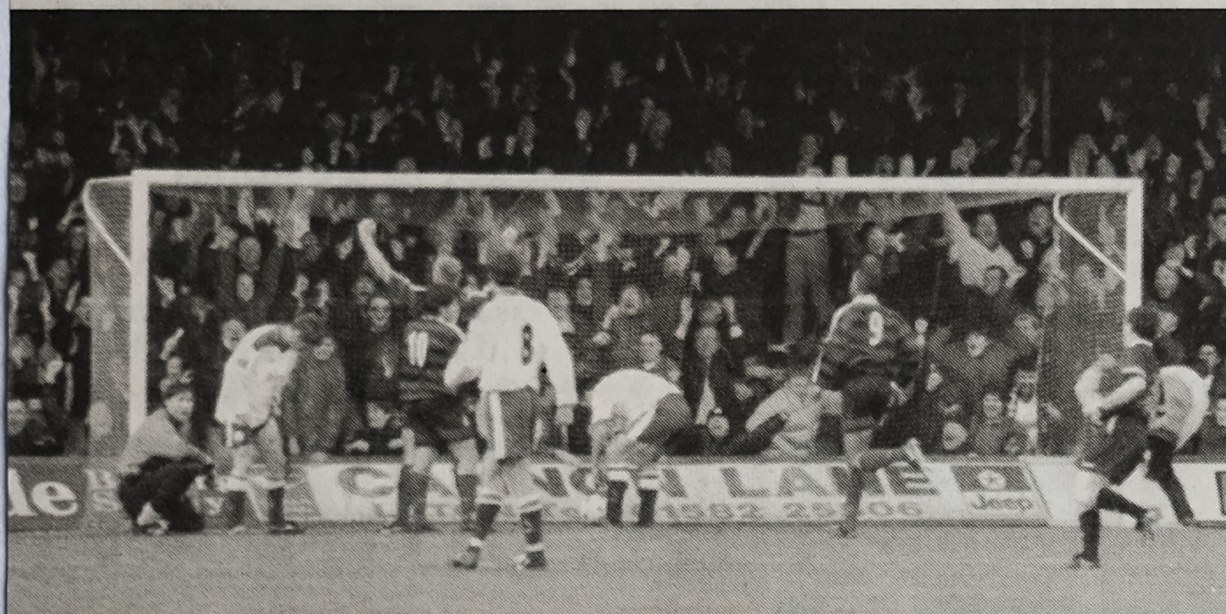
A more clear-cut case of ball to hand you will not see – but referee Scott Mathieson wasted no time in pointing to the spot.

Paul Moody, a £200,000 bargain from Southampton, rammed home for his hat-trick, and from then on Hatters gave up the ghost.

Steve Hayward, a £175,000 bargain from lowly Carlisle, side-footed into an empty net on the hour, after Matt Lawrence's run and cross down the left, but Fulham spared further blushes by missing a series of gilt-edged chances in the last 30 minutes.

More bad news is that it is expected that White will be out for at least two weeks with a knee injury.

Team: Feuer, Patterson, Thomas, Waddock, Davis, White (Davies), Allen, McLaren, Oldfield, Thorpe, Alexander.
Subs not used: Evers, Marshall.
Attendance: 8,366. **Man of the match:** Patterson.



● Doom and gloom: Luton defenders hang their heads as Fulham go three goals up

Feuer pleads for fans' patience

HATTERS keeper, Ian Feuer pleaded with the fans to be patient with him as he held up his hands and admitted: "I know I have had five bad games on the trot."

In an open and honest interview the American keeper said: "I can't put my finger on what's going wrong at the moment. The supporters must be frustrated but we lost to a better team today."

"I feel I am going through a very unlucky spell when every mistake I make becomes a goal."

"God knows I'm not trying to do it, I'm Luton through and through. I love Luton Town and I appeal to the supporters to help me through this rough patch."

"At the moment I am not happy with any of my game, but people go through bad spells."

Nervous

"When I am on top of my form I can stop anything, but at the moment I am nervous about everything."

"I am trying to be honest here and say 'look, I'm not playing to the best of my ability'."

Feuer admitted his long-shot dream of playing for the USA in World Cup '98 was vanishing before his eyes.

"As far as playing for America goes, unfortunately we have a lot of good goalkeepers anyway – it is difficult, but at the moment I simply don't deserve a place."

"It hurts, because I don't want to let anyone down."

"If it was tennis I was playing, I wouldn't care because I would only be letting myself down."

"At the moment there is a lot of pressure on me, and I'm always feeling I'm going to cost us the game."



● In firing line? Luton Keeper, Ian Feuer