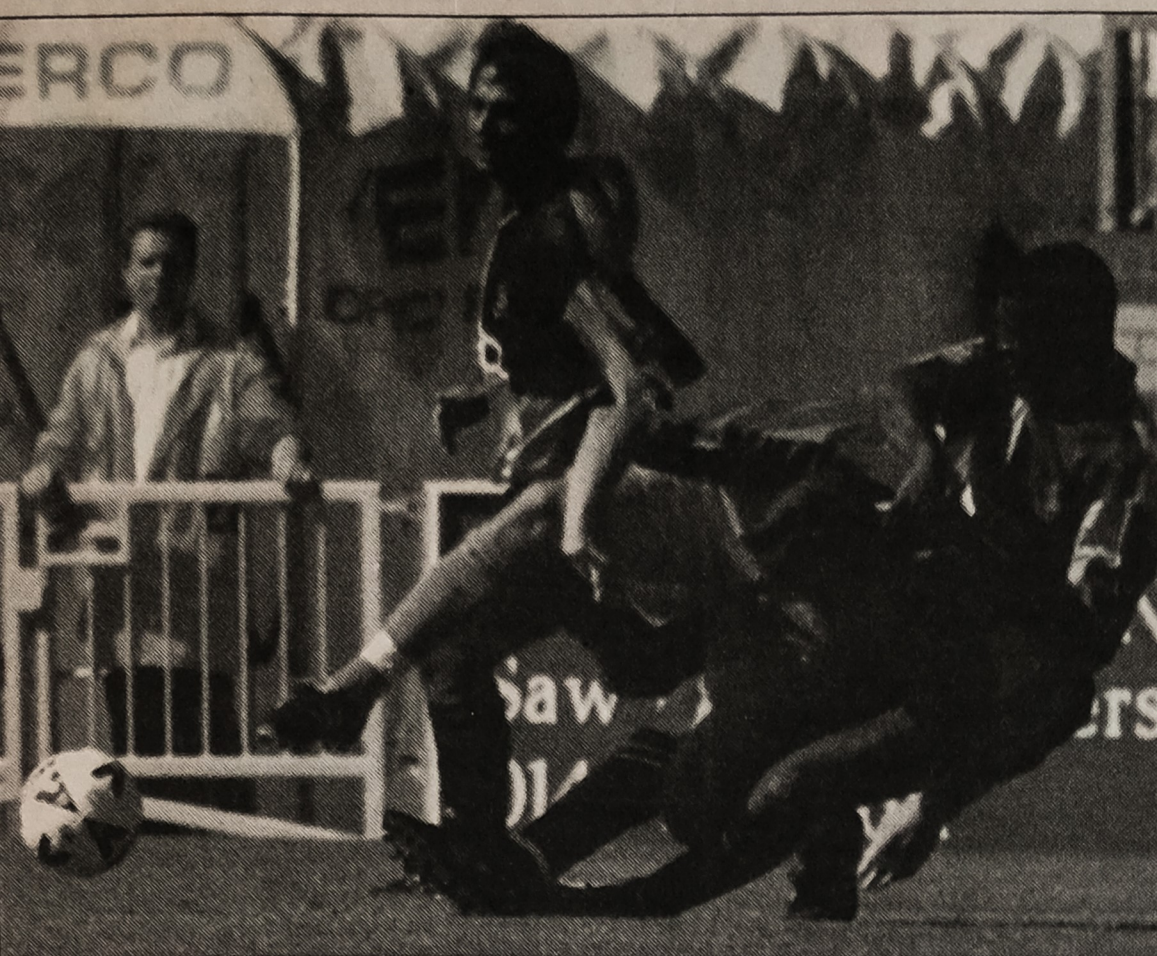




● **ABOVE:** Matthew Spring is hauled down for the free kick which led to Luton's goal.
● **RIGHT:** Steve Davis is congratulated by team-mates after scoring.



Hatters turn on a sizzling show

98/99

Wycombe 0 Luton Town 1
BY virtue of skipper Steve Davis' blistering 37th minute free kick, the Hatters overcame a Wycombe side that lost just three home games last term and in the process carried over their excellent away form from last season.

They totally dominated the Wanderers with a display of passing football that reduced the home side to spectators for long periods of the game, especially in the second half.

Luton started the campaign as bright as the afternoon sunshine in sweltering heat. The Hatters' away following, easily outshouting the Wycombe fans, certainly had a case for their chant of "You're supposed to be at home."

The Town penned Wycombe in their own half for the first ten minutes with Mitchell Thomas, Dwight Marshall, Matthew Spring and Graham Alexander all showing nice touches.

But the first real shot on goal came from the Blues' Dave Carroll who forced Kelvin Davis to dive away to his left to save his firm effort.

Sean Evers started to get his game in gear with the first of many runs from midfield that are his trademark, but the hard work came to nothing because of a wayward final ball.

Phil Gray was getting a buffeting from a robust Wanderers defence and their skipper Keith Ryan was booked after 20 minutes when he whipped Gray's legs from under him for the second time.

The next moment of real drama came at the other end when Carroll chipped through the Town back line who seemed to be playing statues as both Mark Stallard and Keith Scott ran on unopposed as the flag stayed down.

With the goal at his mercy, Scott handed the Town a real let-off by

By **BILL COLE**

smashing his shot against the right hand post.

Wycombe then had their best spell of the game when for a while they matched the Town in skill and commitment.

Their new boy Chris Vinnicombe had the left side of the pitch to himself and he produced a great cross that the unmarked Stallard could only head over.

Luton came back into the game in the best way possible. Spring was wrestled over a couple of yards outside the home penalty area on the left hand side.

Steve Davis buried the resulting free kick with a cracking right foot shot into the back of Martin Taylor's net to give the Town the lead.

Seconds later it could have been two. Marshall took Gray's pass on into the penalty area and went down in a heap under Jason Cousin's hard tackle.

Cousin certainly did not get anywhere near the ball which ran out for a goal kick with the upended Marshall screaming for a spot kick, in vain.

In injury time of the half, Spring was again brought down a little further out, but on this occasion Davis's powerful daisy-cutter fizzed just wide.

So, Luton turned round with a deserved lead without their game play of playing short balls through the Wycombe back line proving successful.

Little had been seen of their French new boy who did, as we forecast last week, sign for the Hatters on Monday. Bacque is the correct spelling of his surname, say the club, who owe an apology to the Town fans turning up at Adams Park in misspelt shirts.

Town's other new man Ray McKinnon showed some good touches in midfield on his debut after finally agreeing to join Luton on Thursday.

It is usually dangerous to sit on a lead for fully 45 minutes, but the Hatters achieved this with some ease. Indeed, if anybody was going to score again it was Luton.

Within two minutes of the restart Paul

McCarthy made a hash of Marshall's left wing cross and the ball fell nicely to Herve Bacque unmarked in front of goal.

Just when he needed a cool head, his composure deserted him and he blazed over an open goal.

The Frenchman, in trying to redeem himself, produced an excellent surprise back heel, but it was too clever for a static Gray. Evers however, made a lot of ground to get to the ball, but he was denied by Taylor's sliding catch.

In an effort to pep up his lacklustre side, Wycombe boss Neil Smillie brought on a midfielder for a full-back and an out-and-out striker, Paul Read, for a midfielder.

Luton's substitution of Marshall by younger Liam George had much more effect on the game. After collecting a booking within seconds of coming on, he ran just too far forward to collect a Gray cross. Had he made the cross it would have settled things for sure.

As it was Luton easily saw out the remaining minutes although Wycombe did manage to produce their first shot of the half on 85 minutes.

Read shot straight at Davis and the Luton keeper also easily gathered Read's shot in injury time that was virtually the last kick of the game.

Afterwards Lennie Lawrence said: "I am a relieved manager. It is the first time we have won our first match of the season for years - certainly since I have been here.

"I was well pleased with that. The back four learned their lesson from the Scott miss and pushed up really well in the second half.

"Bacque needs to settle down and add some simplicity - he tried too hard.

"McKinnon's experience showed just when we needed it in the second half."

Luton: K Davis, Alexander, Thomas, Spring, S Davis, Johnson, McKinnon, Evers, Bacque (George 71), Gray, Marshall (McGowan 81).
Attendance: 5252.



● **Herve Bacque in the thick of the action for Hatters**