

Luton Town factfile

LUTON overcame Oxford in the first round last month after going down 2-3 in the first leg at home. Luton won 3-1 away after facing a 2-4 deficit when Phil Whelan put Oxford ahead after 25 minutes at the Manor Ground. Then goals from Gray, Evers and McLaren tipped the tie on its head. The Hatters have reached the third round of the League Cup (under its various names) only once in the last eight years. The second leg of this season's tie, at Kenilworth Road next Tuesday, is no longer all-ticket for Ipswich Town fans. Seats cost £10 for adults and £5 for concessions.

■ **BOOKMAKERS** Krullinds offer odds of 8-15 against Ipswich gaining the advantage in the first leg of tonight's Worthington Cup second-round first-leg tie at Portman Road. Luton are 9-2 which looks better value, but there's not much point in backing a long-priced potential loser.

A better long shot? Try Graham Alexander, who takes the spot kicks at 40-1 to score the first goal.

■ **IT WAS** not too long ago that Luton Town were regarded as League Cup giants. In 1988 they won the final 3-2 against Arsenal with goals from Brian Stein (2) and Wilson. The following year they were back at Wembley again. This time Nottingham Forest beat them 3-1.

■ **THE** League Cup started in 1961 when Aston Villa beat Rotherham United in a two-leg final. The Merry Millers led 2-0 after the first leg.

■ **ONLY** two teams in the history of the League Cup have never won a game. They won't now, both have gone out of business. They were Accrington Stanley (two attempts) and Maidstone (six attempts).

■ **LUTON** and Mansfield hold the record of scoring the most goals in a single tie. In 1989-90 the Hatters beat Mansfield 4-3 and 7-2. There were 16 goals in all. Luton's record victory was 12-0 against Bristol Rovers in April 1936. Joe Payne scored 10, six shots and four headers. The following season Payne scored 55 goals in Division Three (South) when Ipswich were having their first season as a professional club in the Southern League.

■ **THE** last six Luton Town managers have been John Moore, Ray Harford, Jim Ryan, David Pleat, Terry Westley and now Lennie Lawrence.



THE FRENCH CONNECTION: Herve Bacque arrived from Monaco (centre) but while he was impressive in pre-season for the Hatters, he has yet to fully adjust to the pace of English football
Photographs: CONTRIBUTED

Hatters aiming right to the top

TOUGH: Luton's Graham Alexander, who also takes his side's penalties



LUTON Town, who struggled successfully against relegation last season, hope to be one of the promoted clubs this time around.

They have made their best start to any season since 1969 and Saturday's 2-0 home win over Bristol Rovers has lifted them to third place in the table and in striking distance of leaders Stoke City.

The Hatters' side is formed round 29-year-old Steve Davis, who cost £750,000 from Burnley, money that was wisely spent.

Davis, who scored his third goal of the season against Rovers on Saturday, is the cornerstone of the defence. He provides a formidable 6ft 2ins barrier through the middle.

Luton's only defeat in the League has been at Reading which, ironically, was the Royals' only win. Reading, making their first appearance at the splendid new Madejski Stadium, obviously lifted themselves for the occasion.

The Hatters slipped to a 3-0 defeat and suffered injuries as well. Paul McLaren, a midfield player, is still recovering from damaged medial knee ligaments while Jamaican-born winger Dwight Marshall is only just

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on his way back after twinging a hamstring.

The Hatters have 22-year-old Kelvin Davis in goal. Capped three times at England Under-21 level in 1995 and 1996, he dropped out of the limelight when he lost his first-team place to giant 6ft 7ins American Ian Feuer.

Last season Davis won his place back and Feuer returned to the States last March to play for New England Revolution in a £200,000 deal.

Graham Alexander is a formidable figure in defence.

The star up front is Phil Gray, who has 20 caps for Northern Ireland. He started his career with Tottenham and had his first spell with Luton after loan periods with Barnsley and Fulham.

He scored 34 goals in 115 League games with Sunderland before returning to Kenilworth Road where he was so popular. He plays up front with 20-year-old Stuart Douglas, who developed through the youth scheme.

Manager Lennie Lawrence, who build up a Houdini reputation for keeping Charlton Athletic in the First Division for so long against the odds, believes in giving talented youngsters their chance. It's the way forward for a club like Luton.

It seems fashionable to sign Frenchmen since their World Cup success. Luton are no exception and Herve Bacque arrived from Monaco.

He took the place by storm in pre-season friendlies but lost his shooting boots when the League season started and was dropped. He may be on the bench against Ipswich.

Luton, in common with many clubs, have had to sell top stars to survive and they banked getting on for £2 million by parting with Matthew Upson (to Arsenal) and Ceri Hughes (to Wimbledon) more than a year ago. Then Tony Thorpe moved to Fulham for £800,000 last February.

The Hatters have regrouped stronger than before although there were doubts among their fans as to whether this would be possible.



KEY MAN MISSING: Paul McLaren is a busy midfielder but will struggle to make tonight's game with injuries