

■ My ball!
Adam Locke
tussles for the
ball against
Wigan



■ Take that! Matthew Spring tries to jump a challenge



■ Stuart
Douglas
in the
thick of
the action



■ It's there! Liam George watches Doherty's shot beat the keeper only for the goal to be disallowed

Hatters fall to a quality finish

WIGAN, favourites to win the division, hardly deserved this victory.

The Hatters gave at least as good as they got throughout the game, but were beaten by a quality finish from former Everton striker Stuart Barlow in the 76th minute.

To make defeat even more difficult to bear, Gary Doherty had what looked like a perfectly good goal disallowed after 39 minutes, apparently for offside.

If anyone was offside, it certainly wasn't Doherty, who celebrated his 'score' all the way to his own half before reality dawned to his obvious disappointment and the delight of the home fans.

Big Wigan defender Arjan De Zeeuw featured in both teams' early attacks.

He got on the end of a Darren Sheridan free kick after four minutes, only to direct his header inches wide of the post, then made a desperate but highly effective last-ditch tackle to deny Matthew Spring.

The Luton youngster, who looked the classiest of both sides' midfield throughout, ably assisted by Adam

Wigan Athletic 1

Luton Town 0

Report by BILL COLE

Pictured by ANDY HANDLEY

Locke and Paul McLaren – who had a good game on his return after injury – burst through the centre, fed by Stuart Douglas.

But De Zeeuw managed to throw out a leg to clear as Spring shaped to shoot.

Nathan Abbey then covered himself in glory twice in quick succession.

He had to be alert to push over Kevin Sharp's long-range power drive and from the resulting corner, he did brilliantly to save a missile of a shot from Stuart Balmer after McLaren had miss hit a clearance.

Wigan were looking dangerous in the air and the visitors' defence was tested by three successive swinging corners hit to the heads of Athletic's big men.

When it was Luton's turn to earn successive corners, Balmer was forced to head over his own bar to deny Douglas.

When Spring had his ankle tapped,

Matthew Taylor curled in an inswinging free kick from the right and Doherty, running back towards the kicker, beautifully deflected the ball into goal.

But the assistant referee had already raised his flag for an offside decision that was certainly not given against the scorer.

Wigan upped the pace in the second half and Taylor, in trying to clear one attack, set up Barlow for an attempt on goal.

He beat Abbey but Taylor made amends for his mistake by getting back to clear off the line.

Taylor then featured up the other end with a rasping left foot drive that Roy Carroll did well to save before Liam George nearly added to his goal count.

After a bout of head tennis across the Town goalmouth, Barlow forced home the winning goal well. He brought the ball down and slammed it into the bottom corner from an angle past the helpless Abbey.

Luton: Abbey, Fraser, Taylor, Spring, Doherty, Watts, Johnson, Locke, McLaren (McIndoe 74), Douglas, George.
Attendance: 6,866.