■ Tony Thorpe rounds Darren Ward to set up Luton's first goal

■ Gary Doherty gets up to head Luton's first goal home

Sharpshooter Thorpe plays hero and villain

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TONY Thorpe made one, scored one and then missed one in the dying minutes during a rollercoaster return to Luton.

Luton Town 2
Notts County 2
Report: PETE KENYON
Pictures: ANDY HANDLEY

But after cruising to a 2-0 interval lead, Thorpe's homecoming ended in bitter disappointment as schizophrenic County came out after the break a completely unrecognisable side.

The public announcer tried his best to lift the sagging spirits of those leaving Kenilworth Road by telling everyone that Watford had lost 5-0, but it was little consolation.

Hatters remain seven points away from a play-off place, and, unless they can get maximum points from a forthcoming run of matches against struggling sides, they can kiss goodbye to any chance of division one, and with it the likes of Matthew Taylor, Gary Doherty, Liam George and Matthew Spring, all of whom are being watched closely by the Premiership and division one scouts.

Hatters started brightly enough but their only real chance in a tightly-contested first quarter was a goalmouth scramble which County were lucky to survive.

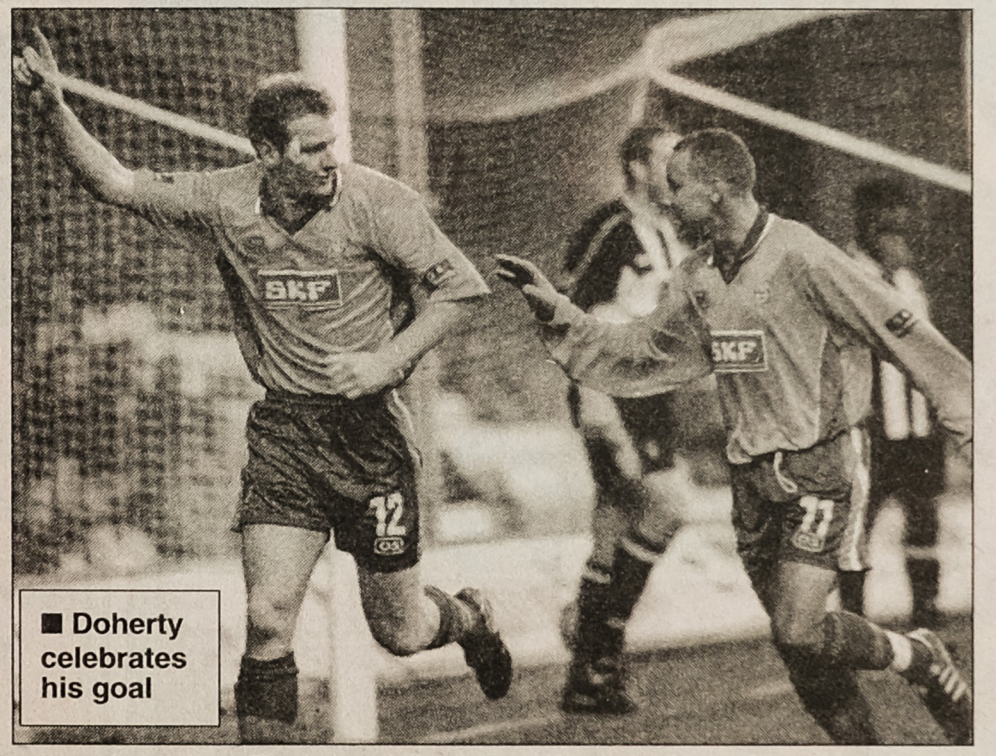
Doherty's far post header was blocked on the line and then Stuart Douglas and Taylor both had shots charged down when it seemed they might score.

Defensive County, for their part, did next to nothing to justify their sixth-place berth and on 37 minutes deservedly fell behind.

From Taylor's inswinging corner, the ball was only half cleared to Spring on the edge of the box.

He played Thorpe down a channel on the right and, following some nifty footwork, he was able to chip the ball back into the six-yard box for Doherty to thunder home a close-range header.

Three minutes later Thorpe was in the thick of the action again – this time rifling home from a slight angle ten yards out following good work on the right from Douglas.



■ Doherty celebrates his goal

Just why on-loan Thorpe can't break into a struggling City side which is flirting with relegation to division three remains a mystery – but a lack of football may not be a problem soon.

Just before the break the livewire striker, who looks fitter, hungrier and sharper than ever, should have put the game beyond County's reach, but for once his first touch failed him giving Darren Ward a chance to clear his lines.

Whatever County manager Gary Brazil said at half time it seemed to do the trick as the visitors abandoned their defensive policy in favour of all-out attack.

With just eight minutes played, Ian Richardson was on the end of a deep cross to nod home at the far post with Nathan Abbey stranded and from that moment on a draw always looked a likely result.

Hatters struggled to create anything and 17 minutes from time Gary Owers fired home a majestic 22-yard volley into the corner of the net after a slight error from Matthew Taylor, who deflected the ball into his path when perhaps he could have cleared.

Having got the equaliser, County seemed content and in the last few minutes Hatters created the better chances, Taylor's free kick being pushed round the post by Ward. With eight minutes left, a quick free kick to Tony Thorpe nearly ended in glory but his dink over the keeper also dinked over the bar.

Luton: Abbey, Fraser (Boyce 61), Watts, Doherty, Johnson, Spring, Locke, Douglas (Sodje 81), Thorpe, Taylor, George.
Attendance: 5,195.
Man of the match: Thorpe.