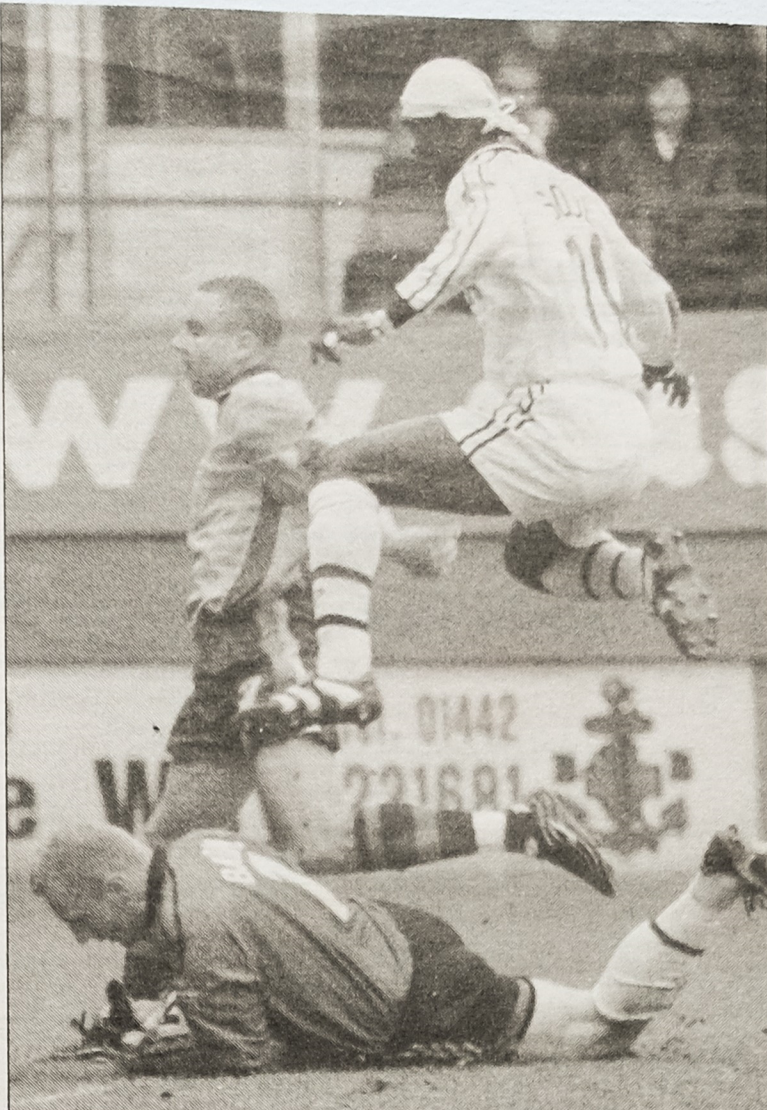




■ Ballet high: Ex-Luton defender Efetobore Sodje takes to the air in yesterday's game against Colchester



■ Julian Watts celebrates after putting Luton one up

Taylor rocket seals points for Hatters

Luton 3 Colchester 2
Report by Pete Kenyon

A MATTHEW Taylor special spared Hatters' blushes after it looked like they were going to be made April Fools.

With eight minutes to play Taylor unleashed a rocket from an acute angle to complete a late recovery and overturn a 2-1 deficit.

In an excellent match of end-to-end football Luton grabbed a ninth-minute lead - then missed a succession of chances to wrap the game up by half time.

Julian Watts bagged his fourth goal this year - heading home Matthew Spring's free kick - but his job was made easier by virtue of him being unchallenged inside the six yard box.

Colchester should have been level

within a minute but Jason Dozzell's volley sailed high over an empty net, and they might have been in front after just three minutes when David Gregory's effort rebounded back off the post.

Gary Doherty gave Efe Sodje - returning to Kenilworth Road just days after last week's free transfer to Colchester - a torrid time, and only a great block by another former Hatter, Aaron Skelton, stopped the Irishman doubling Luton's lead.

Marvin Johnson's impression of David Beckham almost came off in the 25th minute - but after beating two defenders and audaciously chipping from the left angle of the box keeper Simon Brown just managed to thwart the magical effort.

Brown again had to rescue the visitors just before the break, harming Doherty's low shot around the post, and the Irishman should have done better minutes earlier but failed to get a decisive touch on Taylor's driven cross.



■ Johnson gets away from Karl Duguid to get a shot in yesterday

Hatters fell apart in the early stages of the second half, and after Watts and Emmerson Boyce both hit upright, it was Colchester who seized the initiative.

On 52 minutes the tricky Tony Lock held off a challenge on the edge of Hatters' box, then squared for Steve McGavin on the overlap.

With Ben Roberts exposed McGavin made no mistake, side-footing into the roof of the net from 18 yards.

Seven minutes later a dreadful error from Alan White - playing in defence as a result of Doherty's elevation to the front line - gifted Colchester the lead.

McGavin's through ball looked innocuous enough, but White was caught in two minds whether to let the ball run to Roberts or to hoof it into the stand.

Lock was not so hesitant, cheekily nipped in from behind, rounded a hopelessly exposed Roberts and stabbed gratefully into the empty net.

But with 15 minutes left Matthew Spring drilled a low cross into the danger area and Doherty was at the

front of the queue to bundle over the line with keeper Simon Brown stranded at his near post.

Liam George then missed a sitter - somehow hitting his shot over the bar after Doherty's flick-on left him in the clear, but that was soon forgotten when Colchester's defence committed suicide a minute later.

Nobody was marking Taylor as the ball was played to him down the left flank, but the youngster, in acres of space and with two men in support had to use his head to score the winner.

Had he taken the easy option of rolling the ball square for either an unmarked Doherty or George in the six yard box, the goal would surely have been ruled out for offside.

But Taylor decided he didn't need any help and nearly burst the net with a drive from an acute angle that few past Brown inside his near post.

Team: Roberts, Boyce, Watts, Doherty, Johnson, George, McLaren, Spring, Gray, White, Taylor.

Subs not used: McGowan, McIndoe, Kandol, Scarlett, Abbey.

Attendance: 5,125. MoM: Doherty.