

Goal-den days for Town

FORGET Old Trafford, Anfield and Highbury – Kenilworth Road is the place to watch your football if you want to see goals.

Matthew Taylor's 82nd-minute winner sealed a 3-2 home win against Colchester on Saturday – after earlier efforts from Julian Watts and Gary Doherty – and took the season's league tally at Luton's rickety old ground to an amazing 69.

That's six more league goals than at any other stadium in the country and seven more than witnessed this season at the home of the European champions.

The main concern for Hatters boss Lennie Lawrence is that almost as many have gone in at the wrong end as they have in the visitors' goal.

Only Manchester United, Barnsley, Manchester City, Huddersfield and Rotherham can better Luton's 38 goals for home record.

But, equally, only Swindon, Colchester, Oxford, Blackpool and Chester have conceded more than the Hatters' 31 against on home soil.

Saturday's match was, therefore, typical of the season with excellently-taken goals compensating eventually for shocking lapses of concentration.

The Hatters dominated for long periods of the first-half after ex-Luton midfielder Gavin Johnson hit a tame fourth-minute shot against a post.

Six minutes later, an unmarked Watts headed in Matthew Spring's right-wing free-kick from close range after a Colchester defence, including ex-Hatter Efetobore Sodje, went absent without leave.

It was Watts' fourth goal of the season but he was also called into action at the other end on 22 minutes when his excellently-timed crunching, last-ditch tackle prevented a certain goal for Colchester captain David Gregory.

In between, Jason Dozzell hooked over an

match facts

● **HATTERS:** Ben Roberts, Alan White, Julian Watts, Marvin Johnson, Emmerson Boyce, Paul McLaren, Matthew Spring, Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Gary Doherty, Phil Gray. Subs not used: Gavin McGowan, Michael McIndoe, Tresor Kandol, Andre Scarlett, Nathan Abbey.

● **COLCHESTER:** Simon Brown, Joe Keith, Ross Johnson, Jason Dozzell, David Gregory (Joe Dunne, 46), Karl Duguld,

LUTON 3 COLCHESTER 2

Tony Lock, Aaron Skelton, Steve McGavin, Gavin Johnson (Andy Arnott, 64), Efetobore Sodje (Lomana Tresor Lua Lua, 78).

● **Shots on target:** Luton 8, Colchester 6.

● **Off target:** Luton 8 Colchester 5.

● **Corners:** Luton 4 Colchester 6

● **Top Hatter:** Watts – tower of strength.

empty net but the visitors offered little more threat for the remainder of the first-half and Luton should have gone into the interval with a more comfortable lead.

Midfielders Paul McLaren and Spring, who worked well in tandem before the break, both went close, as did fit-again Phil Gray.

Marvin Johnson then displayed the type of nimble footwork and deft chip usually more synonymous with Andy Cole than the Hatters skipper to force Colchester keeper Simon Brown into a scrambled save.

Gary Doherty also showed power and pace to turn Aaron Skelton and force a low near post save from Brown, which would have impressed watching Spurs boss George Graham.

The Hatters started the second-half in a similar vein with Brown tipping a powerful Watts volley on to the crossbar seconds into the restart, but the 29-year-old defender made a rare error for the visitors' 53rd-minute equaliser.

Watts' poor headed clearance fell to Tony Lock, whose square pass was swept firmly past Ben Roberts from the edge of the area by Steve McGavin.

Emmerson Boyce then sent a diving header against an upright at the other end before Lock made an April fool out of Hatters defender Alan White.

Colchester's second goal was a mix-up

made in Middlesbrough with ex-Riverside defender White leaving a McGavin through ball for on-loan Boro keeper Roberts to collect.

But the ball was never going to travel as far as Roberts and Lock capitalised to round the bemused keeper and tap into an empty net.

For 15 minutes, Luton's response was ragged, but they got back on level terms when a fine passing movement saw the versatile Doherty, who normally finds the net when used as a striker, slide into the six-yard box to convert Spring's clever cross.

Liam George, still struggling for confidence, should have clinched victory for the Hatters with eight minutes to go but shot woefully high and wide after being put clear by Gray.

But George's blushes were spared seconds later when wing-back Taylor beat the offside trap, cut in from the left and fired an unstoppable shot into the roof of Brown's net.

Both Doherty and George were standing in offside positions when Gray released Taylor but referee Graham Barber ruled they were not interfering with play.

There was still time for Watts to save his side at the other end, bravely getting in the way of Lock's power drive to head it over for a corner.

As for ex-Hatter Sodje, his afternoon ended in double disappointment, despite getting away with two blatant penalty box bear hugs on Doherty.

Defeat on his return to Kenilworth Road was a bitter enough pill for Sodje to swallow but he also ended the game injured, meaning he could be ruled out of Nigeria's World Cup qualifier with Eritrea this Sunday.

Douglas stalling on signing new terms

STUART DOUGLAS has still not signed a new contract at Kenilworth Road.

Hatters striker Douglas could not leave Luton for free under the Bosman ruling because he is younger than 24, but manager Lennie Lawrence is still keen to agree new terms rather than risk losing him to a tribunal in the summer.

Lawrence said: "Stuart has got certain qualities. His pace, aggression and strength are all

very good and, away from home, he's one of the first names on the sheet. But his goals to games record is diabolical.

"He needs to improve that. I could see how he would be attractive to some teams, but he needs to stay here for another year and score more goals.

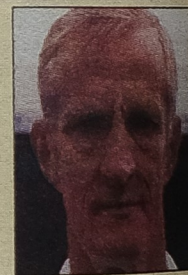
"That would be my strongest advice to him and if he improves his strike rate he might play at a higher level."

Andre Scarlett, Michael

McIndoe and Tresor Kandol are also out of contract in the summer.

Lawrence has indicated that Scarlett will get a new deal, but McIndoe and Kandol will both have to wait until the end of the season to see if they are on the retained list.

Adam Locke, who has signed a new deal, will be sidelined for three weeks with the hamstring strain he picked up at Chesham.



Moore's verdict

With Lennie Lawrence attending Alex Ferguson's benefit dinner, John Moore stood in to take the post-match press conference...

I thought it was a magnificent result. We lost concentration at vital times but the players resisted, came back and won the game with good football.