



■ Andre Scarlett makes a determined challenge for the ball

Sunderland draw suits Hill just fine

LUTON manager insists his side will not be 'whipping boys' when they go to Sunderland for the first leg of the Worthington Cup second round tie.

The game at the Stadium of Light will be played on Tuesday September 19 with the return at Kenilworth Road set for the following Tuesday.

Hill said: "It is wonderful to have this opportunity to play a premiership club, but we want to be in the next round as well."

"So we will go there with a positive attitude, a definite game plan and hope to get a result that we can capitalise on at home."

"We have to match them for commitment first. They are not one of the 'flash Dans' of the premiership. They have a work ethic off the ball as well as on it. Maximum concentration will be required, but we don't just need to defend properly - we have to try to get at them whenever we can."

Thinking back to the Town's unfortunate defeat and the manner of Mitchell Thomas' sending off at Sunderland the last time the teams met, in the League Cup quarter final in December 1998, Hill said: "We owe them one for that! They have made the Stadium of Light a difficult place to go in the last couple of years, but they haven't made the best of starts to the season and we might be going there at the right time."

The Hatters will have a much changed squad from the team that did duty on that last fateful visit to Wearside.

Only Matthew Spring, Marvin Johnson, Stuart Douglas, Gavin McGowan and Paul McLaren who played that night and are still at Luton.

"It will be a fantastic occasion for our young players and gives them a chance to measure themselves against premiership opponents," said Hill.

Questioned about the effect of playing two games a week over an extended period, a factor that dragged the Town's performances down last season, Hill said: "We asked them for a big effort on Tuesday night because of the importance of winning for the whole club. They were superb, but had to go 120 minutes. They are still not at optimum fitness, but we gave them two days off to try and keep them mentally and physically fresh and prepared."

Hill has eased the burden on his men by strengthening his squad this week. Peter

Thompson, 23, a big striker, has been signed from NAC Breda in Holland to compliment the smaller front men Luton have fielded so far this term.

"His medical and scans were fine and it is just a case of waiting for his international clearance to come through now. He has got the height at 6ft 3ins and is an honest boy who knows he has got to come here and work. He hasn't arrived thinking he is the finished article."

"It will take time for him to adapt to our style of play, but I went to Europe because of the inflated prices for target men in England. We were linked to Ritchie Barker for example, but Macclesfield have reportedly turned down an offer of £300,000 plus for him."

"I know Ritchie from my time at Sheffield Wednesday and I see Peter doing all he can do at one third the price."

On Tuesday the Hatters face table-toppers Walsall who have a big target man of their own. The much travelled Brett Angell has caused the Town problems in the past and now functions in a winning Midlands outfit.

"By all accounts they have been playing very, very well," said Hill. They defend from the front to occupy the opposition's back four - something good, hard working teams do automatically. I am looking forward to what should be a fascinating match."

News from the treatment room is that Stuart Douglas, Andrew Fotiadis and Johnson all have hamstring strains.

"We will not be rushing any of them back before the damage has healed, but Andrew may be in contention for Tuesday and Marvin for next Saturday's trip to Swansea."

"Gavin McGowan has had a re-occurrence of his ankle injury after training with the first team squad, but he will be getting back to full training shortly."

Ticket details for the Worthington Cup games are all ticket game at Sunderland, but they are keen to fill the stadium, so adults will pay just £5 and juniors £1, subject to availability. Tickets are on sale until Monday September 18.

Luton season ticket holders have until Tuesday September 19 to claim their usual seats for the second leg.

After that they go on general sale. All other seats are on sale immediately.

Howard nails sorry Hatters

Luton Town 0
Northampton Town 2

NATHAN ABBEY silenced his critics with a wonderful display of goalkeeping - but was powerless to stop the Cobblers cantering to an easy victory.

With former Northampton man Mark Ovendale having to withdraw minutes before kick-off with a neck injury, Abbey returned to first team action for the first time since February.

On that day he left the pitch in tears after buffoonery gifted Bristol Rovers three of their four goals and ultimately led to him being given the chop.

When his name was read out over the tannoy the boo-boys made their opinions known - but after a super first half display supporters in the main stand made a heart warming point of giving him a standing ovation.

It was no less than he deserved.

With barely a minute played Abbey pulled off an extraordinary sprawling stop low to his right to deny Jamie Forrester from just five yards - though the Cobblers leading marksmen would be the first to admit he should have burst the net.

And on 67 minutes - with Luton 2 - 0 down and in disarray - Abbey was off his line like lightning to deny Forrester who found himself clean through from Matthew Taylor's woefully short back pass.

And just seven minutes later Forrester was again bursting through - this time it was Stuart Fraser bungling with a back pass - only for Abbey to deny his man by getting a hand on the ball as Forrester attempted to round him.

He even found time to stick two fingers up at the Cobblers fans behind his goal when they



■ Paul McLaren and Ian Hendon battle it out in midfield

mockingly chanted - with the score at 2 - 0 - 'Abbey, what's the score.'

But apart from Abbey a stirring performance from England Under 21 hopeful Emmerson Boyce in defence there was precious little else to shout about as Hatters waved the white flag of surrender more quickly than a retreating Italian Army.

That they managed just one shot on target tells the whole sorry story.

Mark Stein wasted two glorious opportunities - the first midway through the first half when he completely failed to connect with Liam George's precise pull-back.

The second came just after the break when at least he made contact with George's pass but this time failed to hit the target with a dribbly sort of effort which made Harry the Hatters pre-match penalty kicks look like they had come off the boot of Hotshot Hamish in comparison.

By contrast the Cobblers - whose nickname is a more apt description of Luton's performance - created chance after chance, and once Forrester had them in front seven minutes before the break with a beautifully curled effort from the edge of the box, they never looked like losing.

Forrester rounded Abbey on 17

minutes after being gifted the ball from yet another suicidal Taylor backpass - the Luton defender had a nightmare game - but found the angle too tight.

And Taylor's clumsy challenge on John Hodge from behind looked a certain penalty - except in the eyes of the man in black.

Whatever Ricky Hill said at half time made matters even worse and on the hour Northampton were two goals to the good.

George had time to run the ball out of defence from a Northampton corner and launch a counter-attack but played the ball too far in front of himself.

Cobblers quickly worked the ball out to Hodge and from his pull-back Steve Howard rammed home, giving Abbey no chance.

Hatters fell apart and by the end a score of 5-0 would have better reflected the game, but Abbey's string of fine saves saved his teams blushes.

Team: Abbey, Boyce, Watts, McLaren, Fraser, Taylor, Spring (Holmes 52), Brennan (Candol 60), George, Stein, Scarlett.

Man of the match: Abbey
Attendance 6,712



■ All over: Nathan Abbey can do nothing about the second goal from Steve Howard with John Frain waiting to pounce