

Cureton hat-trick shatters Hatters

Fuccillo's frustration

Reading 4 Luton Town 1

BIG spending Reading were flattered by this scoreline as Lil Fuccillo's men could not turn possession into goals.

A Jamie Cureton hat-trick destroyed hapless Hatters, who remain in a desperate situation in Division Two.

In the first half Barry Hunter opened the scoring against the run of play and went on to add a second by Jamie Cureton.

But a spirited Luton revival had Reading defending desperately at times.

They had an effort headed off the home line, got back into the game with a 70th minute Lee Nogan, goal only to be crushed by two more Cureton scores with Reading's only meaningful efforts in the second half.

Luton started in bright fashion. Skipper Paul McLaren had a third minute effort beaten out, Nogan pulled the ball back from the wing and Liam George's shot was just deflected wide.

Abbey made a smart block when Darren Caskey's flag-kick came in, but his parry fell nicely for Hunter, up from the back, to lash into the roof of the net.

Reading's next attack made it a double whammy for the visitors, Marvin Johnson having to leave the game with a recurrence of his neck injury after being laid out.

Cureton should have doubled Reading's advantage when Taylor slipped over, giving the little striker a clear shot at Abbey but he sliced it horribly wide.

From another setpiece, Cureton made amends for his miss. Caskey's corner was only partially cleared, Neil Smith flicked in back into the box and Cureton swivelled before planting the ball home.

The Town turned round two down but were certainly not second best, apart from the vital department of scoring.

Luton came out in determined fashion. They were first to every ball and attacked at every opportunity, although they were leaving themselves open at the back.

The game was played entirely in the Royals half and three times Hunter had to make great tackles as the Town launched wave after wave of attacks.

Andrew Fotiadis took George's pass on in the 65th minute and knocked it over Whitehead only for Adi Viveash to head it



■ Action from yesterday's Hatters defeat at Reading's Madjeski Stadium

off the line and round the post.

Seconds later Fotiadis again beat Whitehead this time to a ball outside the area but having got clear could only force a corner that went to waste.

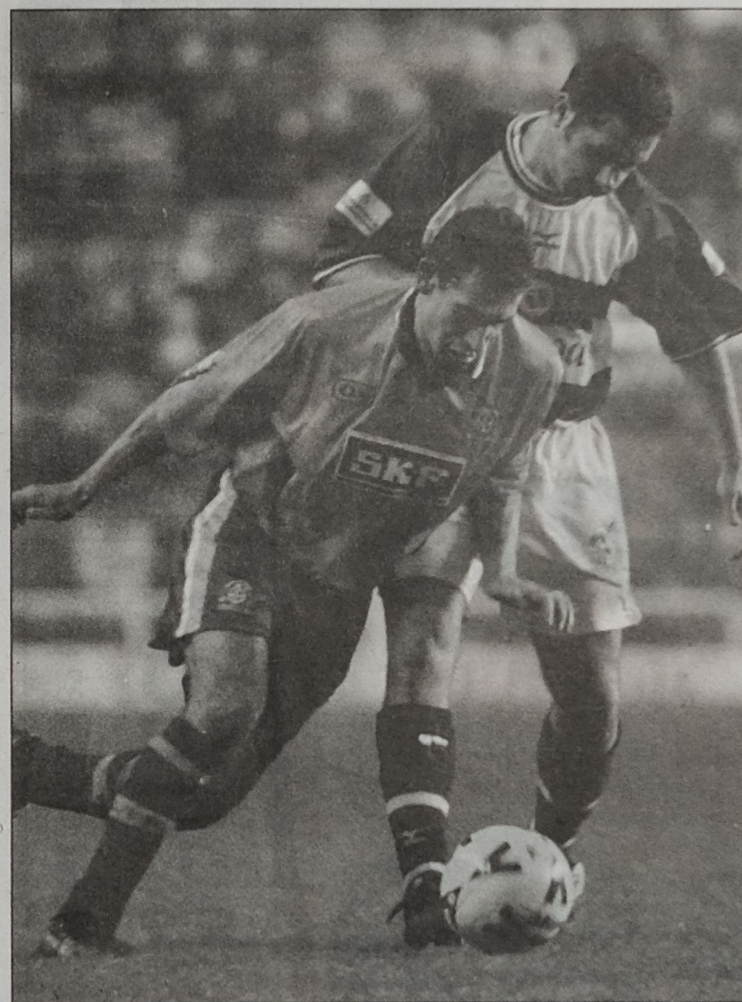
When Taylor and Nogan between them won a corner on the left, the latter was the beneficiary by forcing the ball over the line after an almighty scramble to bring the Town right into things.

But Reading had an enormous slice of luck to score a third goal that settled the points. Taylor and Adrian Whitbread both suffered bad bounces and the ball fell into Sammy Igo's path. He presented Cureton with a tap-in hat-trick goal.

And in the 89th minute a Caskey free kick set up Cureton for his hat-trick with an easy far post header.

Luton Town: Abbey, Boyce, Whitbread, Johnson (Fraser 26), Healin, Spring, McLaren (Locke 54), Taylor, George (Baptiste 82), Nogan, Fotiadis.

Substitutes not used: Ovendale, Scarlett. Attendance: 10,771



FRUSTRATION is the name of the game Luton manager Lil Fuccillo has been playing this week.

He thought he had lined up a midfield player from a First Division club and 22-year-old target man Richard Walker from Aston Villa, only to have firm promises go limp on him on Friday.

Fuccillo said: "I spoke to Aston Villa manager John Gregory on Thursday and he told me the completion of Walker's loan to us with a view to a permanent transfer was just a matter of crossing the 'Ts' and dotting the 'Is', but on Friday Villa put the deal on ice until the new year.

"I spoke to the manager of the midfield player on Thursday and he was pulled out of a reserve game on Monday ready to come to us. Since then the club has had illness and injury sweep through the club and that has put things back until after the holiday period too."

Rumours have been circulating that the man in question is Fulham's Steve Hayward, but they have been scotched by Fuccillo. "We did try for him earlier in the season, but Fulham said no-one would be leaving the club, even if they were unhappy, and as they are top of the league I expect everyone there is in high spirits right now.

"We have had a board meeting this week and they have been good to me. I have got a little money to spend, but I must use it wisely."

Doubts about the men coming in have delayed Fuccillo's announcement of the six players he will be axing from his present playing staff. The biggest earner among them is the only one to be told his fate and he has accepted the leaving terms offered, but Fuccillo feels he is still not in a position to name names.

"In the new year I will have them in one by one and let them know the position," he said.

"Lee Nogan has been in to see me and is looking for a long term contract. He is not getting that, but I did say when I signed him that we would review things when his month was up over Christmas time. I would like to keep him on for another month to tide us over until January, but if he finds another club in the meantime we will have to settle for losing him.

"Stuart Douglas is coming on great now, but he needs to get his full fitness back and will hopefully be ready to come in after the festive period.

"In the Darlington game, Julian Watts had a slight pull on a hamstring, but Emmerson Boyce is a natural replacement.

"Matthew Spring suffered a migraine and was sent to hospital as a precaution. A scan was clear and Peter Thomson has had an MRI scan on his foot that showed up all right as well. He had an injection on Friday and could be in contention for a place against Peterborough on Boxing Day."