



Super Hatters play the catch up game to brilliant effect

TWO great away wins earned back-to-back Hatters victories for the first time this season and enabled them to catch up with the rest of the pack in the fight against relegation.

Oxford, Joe Kinnear's former club, remain well adrift at the bottom and looked doomed.

"Our fate is now in our own hands," said new Town boss Kinnear this week. "Well actually, when I took over last week we had 20 games to play so it always was, but those two wins have helped an awful lot. Now that we have got Northampton and Notts County out of the way, most of the games that are left are against sides in the bottom half of the table and nearly all of them are here, so our home form is vital and I would urge the fans to turn up and get behind the team, full houses will help us a lot.

Wonderful

"It was a wonderful start, but I am not fooled by what I have seen so far, there's areas that can be improved. I want to keep faith in the kids, but players are needed to make the squad stronger. I'd love to have the strongest subs' bench in the division and put on the same performances for the home fans as we have in the away games.

"I have met Mike Watson Challis for the first time. He is very enthusiastic and desperate for the team to do well and has never been happy for us to sell our best players. I've no intention to lose any of our stars and it's up to me to bring new players in to put alongside them.

"There is money available, not a bottomless pit, so I've got to use it wisely. When I first got talking to Luton, several days prior to taking over, I already had irons in the fire for players to come here. In a perfect world it would have been this week. I had lined up a decent international to come here on a month's loan from West Brom, but they have had an injury and the boy I was chasing is needed in the first team, so I've lost him for the time being.

"The chairman has got a three-year budget and I have done mine including wages – which will not be a problem in attracting players to this club. The wages here are higher than many in this division and much higher than at Oxford. It's a good wage structure and is well within the possibilities of the players I've been talking about.

"I intend to see my three-and-a-half year contract out here. The owner likes my ideas and he is very for it. I have seen the plans for the new ground. With that, there are tremendous prospects ahead. I'd love to go into the new stadium in Division One. That means staying up this year and making a real effort to get us up next.

Response

"I have got my first board meeting on Monday where I will be giving my Manager's report and we'll see what their response is to what I have to say."

Kinnear takes his team to high-flying Walsall on Tuesday. "If they can do it at Northampton and at Notts County, we can do it there," said the Hatters, boss, so pleased that the victory in Nottingham had earned the club the 'Performance of the Week' award from a panel of his peers, namely Sir Alex Ferguson, Barry Fry, Dave Bassett, Graham Taylor and Howard Wilkinson.

Liam George's selection for Ireland's under 21 squad brought the comment from Kinnear that he was delighted for the lad. "You don't like to lose your players, but I've told him to go over there, produce the goods and push for a senior squad place."

Smokin' Joe has Hatters on a high

Luton Town 5

Swansea City 3

THE Joe Kinnear fairytale continues as the Hatters made it nine points out of nine since the little Irishman took the helm at Kenilworth Road.

In a game that had everything, the three points earned yesterday were probably the most important of the season so far as they were at the expense of fellow strugglers Swansea.

A packed Kenilworth Road was treated to 90 minutes of sheer entertainment and an eight goal feast.

Stewart Douglas, Liam George, Keith Rowland and a brace from young midfielder Lee Mansell made up the best Hatters tally of the season.

Kinnear award

■ JUST eight days after taking charge at Kenilworth Road Joe Kinnear scooped the League Managers' Association performance of the week award following the Hatters' away win over Notts County.

Kinnear said, "I hope this is the first of many. We are smoking at the moment. It is a new league as far as I am concerned."

To Swansea's credit they hit back with a Giovanni Savarese hat-trick, as they refused to lie down under Luton's onslaught.

The pick of the goals put the Hatters on their way before even three minutes had elapsed. Liam George, a constant menace to the City defence, put in a dangerous cross from the left that was only half cleared up into the air.

It reached the penalty spot and as Roger Freestone rushed out to punch, Mansell beat him to the ball with a brilliant overhead kick that looped into the empty goal.

Five minutes later a typical jinking George

run took him past a couple of defenders and only a super block by the advancing Freestone denied him at the expense of a corner kick. Mathew Spring delivered it in low and fast, and Douglas, coming in like a train, controlled his volley beautifully to side foot powerfully home.

Any pretensions the Town had of cruising home were soon dispelled by Swansea, who were obviously taking inspiration from fellow Welshman Rixon who made a successful comeback in Luton at the end of October.

Richard Dryden, Jude Stirling and especially Emmerson Boyce had to be on their toes to prevent a score, but after having a loud shout for a penalty turned down, Savarese got on the end of a David Romo centre in the 18th minute to head home in great style.

Luton looked like adding to the score everytime they attacked and Swansea were having real problems dealing with corner kicks.

Stirling had a certain goal taken off his forehead by a last gasp clearance.

Six minutes into the second half, Mansell scored his second of the game, his third in five matches since his sudden introduction into the senior side.

George fired in a power drive that was beaten out and Mansell returned the ball into the penalty area, Rowland ducked underneath it completely fooling Freestone who allowed the ball to pass into the net.

It was City's turn to score next. Substitute Nick Cusack played a ball down the left wing, Matthais Verscave had a hard shot blocked by Mark Ovendale and Savarese was quickest to pounce on the rebound.

Petri Helin hit the face of the cross-bar before Rowland looked to have made the game safe with 20 minutes to play. He got free on the Town left and when Freestone repelled his first effort he astutely hammered the rebound low into the far corner.

Back came the Welshman when, with the Town defence in total disarray he was on hand to score from close range to grab his hat-trick.

George finally settled the destination of those vital league points in the 81st minute, when he turned sweetly on a Helin pass to shoot low past Freestone's right hand and move Luton out of the bottom two for the first time in several months, keeping Kinnear's 100 per cent record intact.

Luton Town: Ovendale, Stirling, Boyce, Dryden, Helin, Taylor, Mansell, Spring, Rowland (Locke 89), George, Douglas (Fotiadis 66). Subs not used, Thomson, Breitenfelder, Abbey.

Attendance, 7,085

Luton MoM: Liam George.



■ Lee Mansell leads the Hatters on a lap of honour after his opening goal, and (top) Mansell shows his delight after his second