

Five-star Luton put on the best show since '97

LUTON TOWN thumped in five goals for the first time since 1997 as Joe Kinnear's terrific start to his Kenilworth Road managerial reign continued on Saturday.

Kinnear's side, brimming with confidence and attacking verve, leapfrogged Swansea City in the Division Two relegation zone after a thrilling 5-3 victory over the Welshmen.

Tenacious teenager Lee Mansell scored twice for the rejuvenated Hatters with Stuart Douglas, Keith Rowland and Liam George also netting to give Kinnear his third successive victory since taking over as boss.

Lethal Luton even ran out of the elaborate goal celebrations that have also become a feature under Kinnear. The five-star display came just five days short of the date four years ago when the Hatters last scored five times.

On that occasion - February 22, 1997 - David Oldfield's hat-trick and other efforts from Gary Waddock and Mitchell Thomas sealed a 5-1 win over Preston. That result preceded a five-match run without a win as Luton's promotion push began to falter.

A similar sequence of results seems unlikely now for the Hatters who, in a magnificent first week under Kinnear, scored nine goals and picked up nine points.

The relegation fight had almost appeared futile before Kinnear's arrival but a sensational seven days has dramatically changed the whole atmosphere at the club.

Each player has been given a clearly-defined role by Kinnear to operate in their own spaces with freedom of expression an important factor.

Skillful players like George and Matthew Taylor are revelling in their free licenses to attack, but Kinnear did identify defensive deficiencies in Saturday's display that he will work to eradicate.

Determined Venezuelan striker Giovanni Savarese, shown the door by previous Hatters boss Ricky Hill after an unsuccessful trial, was the main beneficiary and grabbed a hat-trick for the Swans.

In fact, struggling Swansea posed more problems than play-off hopefuls Northampton and Notts County had in the Hatters' previous two matches, but only after the home side swept into a ninth-minute, two-

match facts

LUTON 5 SWANSEA CITY 3

- **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Jude Stirling, Emmer-son Boyce, Richard Dryden, Petri Helin, Lee Mansell, Matthew Spring, Keith Rowland (Adam Locke, 90), Matthew Taylor, Liam George, Stuart Douglas (Andrew Fotiadis, 66). Subs not used: Peter Thomson, Friedrich Breitenfelder, Nathan Abbey.
- **SWANSEA:** Roger Freestone, Matthew Bound, Giovanni Savarese, Kris O'Leary, Damien Lacey (Steve Watkin, 78), Stuart Roberts, Jason Price (Nick Cusack, 56), Lee Jenkins (Nicolas Fabiano, 46), Leigh de Vulgt, David Romo, Matthias Verschave.
- **Shots on target:** Luton 11, Swansea 8.
- **Off target:** Luton 2, Swansea 9.
- **Corners:** Luton 7, Swansea 3.
- **Referee:** Anthony Bates (Staffordshire).
- **Top Hatter:** Mansell - all-action performance.

SATURDAY'S vital Division Two match was not the first time Swansea City boss John Hollins has crossed swords with Hatters manager Joe Kinnear and lost. The two men lined up against each other as players in the 1967 FA Cup final that Kinnear's Spurs won 2-1 against Chelsea.

goal lead. Mansell and Douglas both found the net in a perfect response to the rousing reception given Kinnear before his first home match.

First, Mansell sent an acrobatic overhead kick over stranded Swansea keeper Roger Freestone after George's cross had been poorly cleared. The 18-year-old midfielder, who had scored his first senior goal at QPR after 58 seconds of his debut, waited just 130 seconds of Saturday's game to net his second.

George then waltzed through the visitors defence, only to be denied by Freestone before Douglas stabbed Matthew Spring's corner over the line at the far post.

Swansea reduced the arrears on 18 minutes when Savarese's soaring header left Mark Ovendale

helpless. Both teams continued to play attractive football that belied their low league positions.

Mansell made it 3-1 on 51 minutes when his cross nestled into Freestone's bottom corner after Rowland ducked under the ball to deceive the Swans keeper. Douglas then missed a glorious 53rd-minute chance before Savarese netted his second.

Ovendale did well to beat out Matthias Verschave's fierce shot after the French striker had skipped past Jude Stirling but Savarese swept in the rebound.

Petri Helin rattled the bar moments later and, on 70 minutes, Rowland scored his side's fourth.

The impressive on-loan QPR midfielder was put clear on goal by George and, after hitting his first effort straight at Freestone, calmly slotted the rebound home.

But Swansea refused to throw in the towel and, on 79 minutes, Savarese claimed his hat-trick, turning smartly to fire into an empty net after Ovendale had saved another Verschave effort.

Four minutes later, George put the game beyond doubt when he swivelled brilliantly to fire into the bottom corner after Helin's low cross. It was a fitting finale to a pulsating encounter that Kinnear admitted afterwards could have finished 8-5.

Verschave (twice), Romo, Savarese and Stuart Roberts all went close with other second-half efforts for the Swans. But the fact that Kinnear's biggest fear before Saturday's match was over-confidence marks the progress made during the new manager's short spell in charge.

Joe's verdict

It was a marvellous day at the end of a fantastic week. I would have settled for five points from my first three games. Swansea were the toughest team we have played but we did not defend well and I can't brush that under the carpet. It must have been a terrific game to watch but I was having kittens at times with some of our defending.

