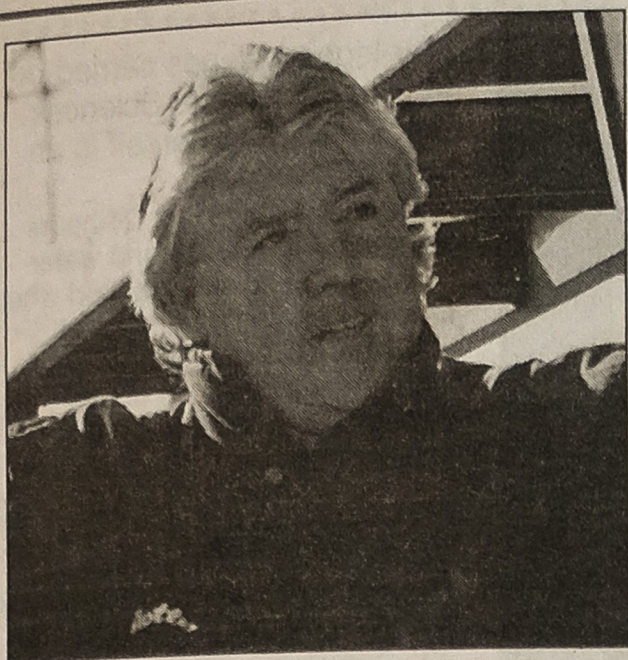




Stadium carrot for Kinnear

LUTON Town's new stadium was obviously a major factor in attracting Joe Kinnear to the club.

Not only do vastly improved facilities provide the promise of a much more prestigious, efficient and pleasant place to work, but Kinnear was also offered a financial stake in the proposed development close to junction 10 of the M1.

Significantly, the land has been acquired, not by Luton Town directly, but by chairman Mike Watson-Challis to provide every opportunity for the club, the fans and the town itself to protect the long term future of its football club in Luton and to once again make it a major force in football.

The Hatters manager believes this to be an exciting time.

"My job is to get us into the first division for the move to the new stadium. Hopefully in a couple of years we will have a much stronger team that will attract a bigger audience to fill it."

Despite leading the Town to four wins out of five games in February, Kinnear was pipped to the February Manager of the Month, title by the four wins and two draws earned by Mark McGhee's Millwall in the month.

"I'm not concerned about not winning that award," said Kinnear. "I've won it several times when I was at Wimbledon. I'm totally focussed on keeping us up."

"I haven't got any points targets, everything is in our own hands and we must take on every match with a positive attitude, that is key."

"Everybody now is fighting for their lives at the bottom and they all know how important it is to inflict maximum damage on those around you down there."

"As regards bringing in new faces, the good results have bought me some time. Players I had earmarked to come have had to stay because of injuries within their clubs."

"Two deals are on hold and I'm waiting for them, I don't really want to move elsewhere and the recovery of the other players will allow them to come here, possibly this week."

Kinnear was complimentary on the form of Lee Mansell.

"Lee has done very well. He is a level headed lad and a very enthusiastic player. I had a long chat about his future with him in my office the other day and told him that he needs to improve on certain aspects of his game, but if he continues to work hard and keep his feet on the ground, he could really make the grade."

"I realise he is a YTS lad, but I'm certainly looking to get him on a professional contract in due course."

Mansell and Matthew Spring were suspended for yesterday's match, but can return for Tuesday's game against Cambridge United.

The U's welcomed back their most successful former manager, John Beck on Thursday after sacking Roy McFarland earlier in the week. Beck watched and made notes from the Kenilworth Road press box when Luton met Wycombe in early January, but the Town a different proposition these days.

In-form Hatters make their point

00/01

Luton Town 0
Bristol Rovers 0



■ On the ball: Keith Rowland

IT was honours even at Kenilworth Road yesterday in a game that saw few attempts on goal but a real battle in midfield.

A win either way would have condemned the loser to greatly increased pressure at the bottom of the table. A draw keeps both teams in with a chance of survival.

Given the team he had to field, Luton manager Joe Kinnear was pleased with the point gained against a team for whom he had the greatest respect following their mid-week win at Bournemouth.

Without Matthew Spring and Lee Mansell through suspension, he gambled on bringing a half-fit Julian Watts into the heart of his back line, having been forced to move last week's defensive hero Paul McLaren into midfield.

Mark Ovendale was injured in training this week, so Nathan Abbey took over in goal for a fixture that proved a nightmare for him last season.

Both sides had chances in a limp first half but neither could cash in. Liam George and Mark Stein found themselves clear of the visiting defence several times, but wanted to walk the ball into the net instead of taking the direct route to goal.

Ansah Owusu got away twice for Rovers, only to put a weak shot straight at Abbey with the best chance and when Emmerson Boyce embarrassed his keeper with an appallingly weak back pass, Abbey did brilliantly to save his blushes with a great sliding tackle that laid

out the big forward in the process.

After 36 minutes Rovers had a setback when Simon Bryant got the worse of a challenge with McLaren and had to be carried off with a suspected broken leg. Lithuanian skipper Vitalijs Astafjevs replaced Bryant and went on to have a marvellous game for Bristol.

After the opening exchanges which went to Luton, Rovers took over and central defenders Watts and Richard Dryden had to be on constant watch to deny Owusu and the in form Nathan Ellington.

They almost went in at the interval a goal to the good when Watts sliced a clearance towards goal forcing Abbey to make a solid punch from under his bar.

George fed Stein with a lovely pass on 50 minutes, but Rovers captain Steve Foster, who was having a great game, was able to get a foot in.

From the resulting corner Watts was left holding his head after putting a simple header over the bar when totally unmarked.

The Bristol midfield was causing Luton tremendous problems, but the home defence gave nothing away where it mattered.

Hatters were somewhat fortunate when Scott Jones planted a header in the net from a Trevor Challis corner. The visitors' jubilant celebrations were stopped short as the effort was ruled out for offside.

Hatters hit back when Rowland's long cross was headed back across goal by George before the ball was scrambled away.

Watts then had to make a magnificent goal line tackle on Foster when Abbey made a mistake.

If substitute Stuart Douglas had had better luck when charging down an attempted clearance by Bristol keep Nick Culkin the Town would have clinched a six pointer.

As it was they had to settle for one, a result which was just about right.

Luton Town: Abbey, Boyce, Watts, Dryden, Helin, Taylor, McLaren (Stirling 80), Rowland, Locke, George, Stein (Douglas 67). **Subs not used:** Fotiadis, Tomson, Ward.

Attendance: 7405.

Man of the match: Matthew Taylor.



■ Mark Stein keeps his eye on the ball in the clash with Bristol Rovers



■ Paul McLaren battles with Dwayne Plummer for midfield supremacy