

AMAZING

BRENTFORD v Luton Town 2001 will surely go down in the annals of football history as the most incident-packed, meaningless end-of-season encounter ever.

The match will inevitably be remembered for Jude Stirling's arrest after an alleged incident with a supporter, but there was also a feast of action on the park.

Mark Ovendale's sending off after 76 seconds was possibly the quickest ever for a goalkeeper in the Football League.

His replacement Scott Ward then saved a penalty with his first touch in professional football before Steve Howard opened the scoring from the half-way line.

After a total of 36 goal attempts – three of which rattled the woodwork – the score finished 2-2.

These chaotic proceedings were also played out to an accompaniment of incessant "Noades Out" chants from disgruntled home supporters.

And the evening finished with Ron Noades addressing a 200-strong restless throng of home fans upset by talk of their owner taking over other clubs and of a move to Woking, as well as the departure of manager Ray Lewington to Watford.

It certainly beat stopping in and watching Eastenders for Thursday night entertainment.

Ovendale was red-carded for serious foul play when he wrapped his arms around home striker Scott Partridge's ankles and hauled him down in the penalty box.

Partridge had raced clear after a slip by Emmerson Boyce, but shot straight at Ovendale.

The ball then broke kindly for Partridge, who was denied a certain scoring opportunity by the grounded Ovendale.

Skipper Paul McLaren and Joe Kinnear were then engaged in a lengthy touchline discussion before Paul Shepherd was the outfield player sacrificed and Ward ran on to face Lloyd Owusu's penalty.

And the 18-year-old keeper could not

Wow! This crazy game had it all

DAVE FLETT reports on a remarkable night at Griffin Park...

have dreamed up a better start to his football career, diving low to his right to push Owusu's firmly-struck spot kick behind for a corner.

Ward then comfortably saved a long-range Jay Lovett effort before 10-man Luton, now fielding a 3-4-2 formation, dominated the rest of the half.

Bees keeper Oli Gottskalkson pulled off excellent saves to keep out a strong Howard header and a Matthew Taylor piledriver.

But Liam George should have done

better than firing straight at the Icelandic keeper's legs when released for a clear run on goal by Howard after 20 minutes.

Howard, leading the line excellently and enjoying his best game in a Hatters shirt, drew unlikely comparisons with England captain David Beckham when he broke the deadlock six minutes later.

The fit 2in striker reacted brilliantly when Gottskalkson's free-kick from the left flank fell to his feet 50 yards from goal, firing powerfully and accurately into the bottom corner.

Gottskalkson charged 30 yards off his line to block Howard's route to goal on 36 minutes and George could not emulate his striking partner's earlier

feat, sending a 35-yard shot sailing over the unguarded net.

Ward, who had been virtually anonymous after his heroic entrance, held his concentration to save Tony Folan's stinging drive on the stroke of half-time.

The Hatters began the second-half with Howard as a lone striker and George playing in a more withdrawn wide-left role.

Brentford immediately showed more spirit than in their despairing first-half display and Eddie Hutchinson smacked the underside of Ward's bar within seconds of the restart.

But the visitors doubled the lead on the break after 51 minutes.

Howard was again involved, heading into the path of McLaren, who had broken powerfully from the half-way line.

The Hatters captain then side-stepped last man David Theobald before sidefooting past Gottskalkson with his left foot for another fine goal.

But Brentford reduced the arrears just four minutes later when Partridge fired into the roof of the net after Marvin Johnson had cleared an Owusu shot off the line.

Johnson clipped the top of the bar with a deflected effort at the other end and Hutchinson also hit the woodwork before Ward saved Theobald's downward header.

Brentford levelled the scores against a tiring Luton side on 66 minutes when sub Mark Williams sidefooted precisely in from 10 yards after Partridge's cross had evaded a clutch of players from both sides at the near post.

The match was an unexpectedly exciting end to the Hatters' away programme this season and also saw Boyce and George emerge as possible candidates to fill problematic wide positions if needed next season.

Boyce made some powerful and athletic raids down the right flank while George offered a reminder of the dazzling skills he can provide on the left when playing with confidence.

Match facts

BRENTFORD 2 LUTON 2

● **BRENTFORD:** Oli Gottskalkson, Ivar Ingimarsson, David Theobald, Tony Folan, Jay Smith, Eddie Hutchinson, Jay Lovett, Matt Sommer (Mark Williams, 46), Jay Tabb (Gareth Graham, 88), Lloyd Owusu, Scott Partridge. Not used: Julian Charles, Paul Smith, Lee Fieldwick.

● **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Paul Shepherd (Scott Ward, 3), Emmerson Boyce, Richard Dryden, Marvin Johnson, Lee Mansell (Adam Locke, 67), Matthew Spring, Paul McLaren, Matthew Taylor, Steve Howard, Liam George. Not used: Julian Watts, Stuart Douglas, Mark Stein.

● **Shots on target:** Brentford 12 Luton 7.

● **Off target:** Brentford 8 Luton 9.

● **Comers:** Brentford 6 Luton 3.

● **Referee:** Michael Jones - Chester.

● **Top Hatter:** Howard – a real handful.



Joe's view

6 We created so many chances in the first-half despite getting off to a horrendous start when we were down to 10 men after a minute. We then showed resilience, great character and took the game to them. It should have been 3-0 at half-time. I was disappointed to concede two goals but tiredness crept in because the same squad has played a lot of games. The performance does not hide the season we have had, but it was nice to see a smile back on players' faces. They were happy with the way they played. Scott Ward did exceptionally well and Steve Howard is now getting called David Beckham after his goal. He enjoyed that. He also worked and ran off the ball well and showed a bit of pace.



AMAZING: Steve Howard is congratulated after his super goal.