



PICK THAT ONE OUT: Torquay goalkeeper Kevin Dearden has no chance as Luton's fifth goal hits the back of the net.

Picture: JOANNA CROSS

Ooh, aah, Valois...it's star billing on debut



BIG DEBUT: Jean-Louis Valois.

Joe: Now do it week in, week out...

HATTERS' boss Joe Kinnear was as enthusiastic as the fans about Saturday's 5-1 demolition of Torquay.

He said: "It was a magnificent day and we need to serve up those standards week in, week out to fill the stadium, get more revenue and get more players."

And he was even more pleased with the debut of Frenchman Jean-Louis Valois.

Kinnear said: "It was a virtuoso performance with a wonderful strike and goal to cap it."

"He brought out what we have seen in training on to the pitch, which is not always easy."

"He fits the bill perfectly and entertains the fans as well."

"He's a player I've been tracking for a while."

"We've got him for a year and I hope I can extend his contract."

"Believe it or not it was his first game for two months, but he's been keeping himself fit and there's probably more to come from him."

HATTERS hit-man Carl Griffiths scored the club's first hat-trick in over three-and-a-half years on Saturday but even he had to share star billing with French sensation Jean-Louis Valois.

Griffiths bagged a hat-trick of headers in Saturday's thumping 5-1 victory against Torquay while left-winger Valois thrilled the home crowd with his mesmerising ball skills and a 35-yard wonderstrike.

Steve Howard had earlier opened the scoring and was mobbed ecstatically by the same team-mates he had almost come to blows with just seven days earlier during extraordinary scenes over a twice-taken penalty in York.

"And even Torquay's own goal was scored by a Luton player with Kevin Nicholls crashing an unstoppable downward header past a powerless Mark Ovendale."

Griffiths became the first Hatters player since Tony Thorpe against Blackpool in January 1998 to walk away with the match ball and he thrived on the pin-point crossing ability of Valois and the fit-again Matthew Taylor.

The Welsh striker's predatory penalty box skills proved too much for Torquay, as did an exciting display of trickery and brilliance from Valois during an overwhelmingly one-sided affair.

Few players can ever have made such an impressive impact on their Nationwide League debut than Valois and he received a standing ovation when he was substituted on 81 minutes after he scored a goal to rank among the finest witnessed at Kenilworth Road.

It was so good that even the

match facts

LUTON TOWN 5 TORQUAY UNITED 1

● **HATTERS:** Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, Russell Perrett, Chris Coyne, Matthew Taylor, Paul Hughes (Ian Hillier, 26, Adrian Forbes, 45), Matthew Spring, Kevin Nicholls, Jean-Louis Valois (Stuart Douglas, 81), Steve Howard, Carl Griffiths. Subs not used: Scott Ward, Richard Dryden.
● **TORQUAY UNITED:** Kevin Dearden, Steve Tully (Tony Bedeau, 52), David Woosley, Martin McNell (Paul Holmes, 46), Troy Douglas, Jason Rees, Mark

Nicholls (Elfon Williams, 66), Kevin Hill, Marcus Richardson, David Graham, Lee Russell. Subs not used: Ryan Northmore, Mike Williamson.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 14, Torquay 3.
● **Shots off target:** Luton 4, Torquay 5.
● **Corners:** Luton 13, Torquay 6.
● **Top Hatter:** Carl Griffiths – lethal around the box.
● **Referee:** Lee Cable (Surrey).
● **Attendance:** 6,392.

beleaguered away fans applauded while home supporters were lifted off their seats in appreciation as the former Lille player unleashed a fantastic long-range shot that crashed into a helpless Kevin Dearden's top corner.

That was the Hatters' fourth goal and Valois then indulged in a spot of cruel showboating as he delighted the crowd and tormented Torquay with his full array of dazzling skills.

And visiting manager Roy McFarland admitted he was a relieved man when Joe Kinnear withdrew the Frenchman, saying: "I was glad to see the back of him. He tore us apart and teased us all afternoon. He's got good control and can strike the ball as he

proved with a great goal. He will be a revelation in this league if he stays."

The Hatters dominated Saturday's match from the start and former Challney Boys School pupil Dearden had to be alert to keep Griffiths off the scoresheet after just five minutes.

Howard broke the deadlock on 18 minutes when he was on hand to sidefoot into an inviting net from close range after Griffiths' quick shot on the turn had pinged back off a post.

Luton doubled their advantage on 31 minutes when Valois fed the overlapping Taylor and his precise cross was headed firmly inside Dearden's near post by Griffiths.

Torquay were gifted an unexpected avenue back into the game when a

hopeful left-wing cross from ex-Hatter Jason Rees was met with a powerful header by Nicholls that beat a bemused Ovendale for the fourth own goal Luton have conceded this season.

But the Hatters restored their two-goal cushion on the stroke of half-time when Griffiths headed in off the bar after an excellent right-wing cross on the turn from Valois.

Dearden prevented both Howard and Griffiths adding to the scoreline early in the second-half before Valois fired in the spectacular fourth goal on the hour.

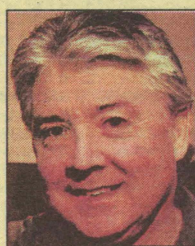
Griffiths then completed his hat-trick with a diving header into the bottom corner after another tremendous Taylor cross.

Torquay have not won a league game in Luton since 1929 and never looked like breaking that 72-year hoodoo on Saturday.

The Gulls' best effort of the afternoon came on 89 minutes when David Graham's firm strike forced a fine save from the recalled Ovendale.

A delighted Kinnear took a bow as he milked the applause of exuberant home fans on his way back to the dressing room and the clear gulf in class between Saturday's two sides should give the Hatters boss and his players renewed confidence in their bid for promotion.

Joe Kinnear's verdict



"We played some wonderful football and had all the ingredients that have been missing in recent weeks. The finishing was top drawer and our crossing was magnificent. There were so many pleasing points. The defending has always been good this season bar the own goals so it was

pleasing to get the approach work and finishing right. I was pleased for the fans after the disappointment of the Lincoln match and it was the best way to thank people for coming to watch us. It was a magnificent day and we need to serve up those standards week in, week out to fill the stadium."