

Crowe swoops to deny Diamonds

01/02

Luton Town 1
Rushden & Diamonds 0

THIS scrappy affair was settled by Dean Crowe's eighth goal in 11 games to move the Hatters up to second in the table.

Although premiership referee Paul Danson did his best to spoil the game – the players were competitive rather than vicious – the Town defence proved resilient under great pressure for the second week running to earn back-to-back wins.

The game was a great deal more long ball than football in what represents the nearest thing Luton get to a local derby these days.

But Joe Kinnear will be delighted that the three points gained justified the means as Luton restricted their ambitions in the second half to hold on to their 33rd minute lead.

The goal followed a brilliant run from Matthew Spring, who did brilliantly to beat man after man to put Steve Howard away. Howard was a real handful for the visitors throughout and his cross was sliced against the post by Diamonds's Paul Underwood. Ahmet Brkovic turned it back towards goal and Crowe got the vital touch to beat defenders on the line.

Both sides had had chances to score before that.

Emmerson Boyce made a delightful run down the wing and crossed to Howard in the first minute. The header was beaten out and then Rushden's Gary Butterworth and Onandi Lowe should both have done better than head wide from good positions.

The home defence was disrupted by an early injury to Chris Coyne, who damaged his right leg – hardly the way to celebrate the fact that his wife presented him with a son on Friday.

He was forced off the field after only 11 minutes yesterday.

Luckily for Kinnear some of his experienced men are returning after injury and his was able

to call on Russell Perrett to come on and play well alongside new boy David Bayliss in the centre of defence.

On the half hour, Jean-Louis Valois, also returning from injury, almost broke the deadlock with an exciting run and shot, reminiscent of his early season performances, that fizzed just wide with Billy Turley completely beaten.

After his goal, Crowe was hauled down in the area but penalty appeals were waved away.

Then his pace got him away from his marker again only for desperate defending to stop him setting Brkovic up for a tap-in.

Although they only just deserved their half time lead, that almost disappeared when Taylor smashed a clearance inches over his own bar.

Bayliss made his first mistake in a town shirt with a weak second half back pass that enabled Duane Darby to charge down Ovendale's hurried clearance. Luck was with Luton as the rebound bounced wide.

Diamonds manager Brian Talbot made an

inspired substitution on the hour by bringing Scott Partridge on for Darby and he certainly pepped up the visitors' attack.

With his side pushing forward in search of an equaliser, he left two Town men standing but Ovendale was equal to his ten-yard angled shot. And he easily saved another Partridge effort that did not match his excellent run down the wing.

Butterworth then missed a sitter. He was fortunate to get through the Hatters defence with strong arm tactics but with only Ovendale to beat, his shot threatened the corner flag not the goal.

Turley came up for an injury time corner but Luton prevailed for all the spoils.

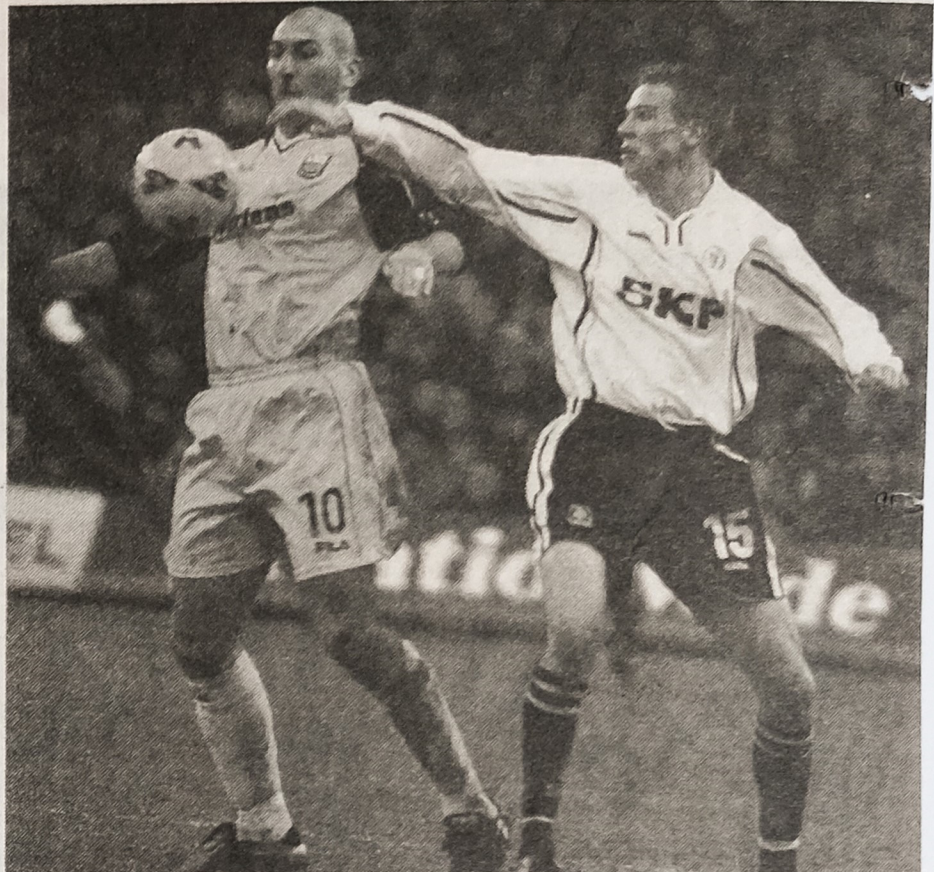
Luton Town: Ovendale, Boyce, Coyne (Perrett 11), Bayliss, Taylor, Brkovic, Nicholls, Spring (Holmes 46), Valois (Hillier 75), Howard, Crowe.

Subs not used Emberson (GK), Forbes, Attendance 7495.

Man of the match Dean Crowe.



■ Celebration time: Hatters players mob Dean Crowe



■ Challenging: Matthew Taylor in a midfield tussle



■ Fifty-fifty: Jean-Louis Valois – back in action yesterday

NATIONWIDE DIVISION 3

Bristol Rovers	0	Hartlepool	0
(postponed because of frozen pitch)			
Exeter	2	Kidderminster	1
Halifax	1	Shrewsbury	2
Lincoln	0	Torquay	0
Luton	1	Rushden	0
Macclesfield	2	Leyton Orient	1
Oxford	3	Mansfield	2
Plymouth	1	Darlington	0
Rochdale	0	Southend	1
Scunthorpe	2	Hull City	1
Swansea	0	Carlisle	0
York City	1	Cheltenham	3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Plymouth	22	14	6	2	32	11	48
Luton	22	13	3	6	43	28	42
Mansfield	22	12	5	5	37	28	41
Hull	22	11	7	4	37	22	40
Rochdale	22	11	6	5	32	22	39
Shrewsbury	22	11	4	7	33	28	37
Scunthorpe	22	9	8	5	38	24	35
Cheltenham	22	9	8	5	38	24	35
Rushden	22	7	9	6	33	31	32
Exeter	22	8	6	8	25	35	30
Kidd' minster	22	8	5	8	20	20	29
Darlington	22	8	5	9	27	31	29
Hartlepool	22	8	4	10	26	20	28
Southend	22	8	3	11	24	26	27
Leyton Orient	22	7	6	9	29	33	27
Lincoln	22	5	10	7	22	23	25
Oxford	22	6	7	9	23	27	25
Macclesfield	22	6	7	9	21	29	25
Swansea	22	6	6	10	26	34	24
York	22	6	4	12	26	40	22
Torquay	22	6	4	12	16	31	22
Bristol Rov	21	5	6	10	15	25	21
Carlisle	22	4	8	10	18	27	20
Halifax	222	4	7	11	16	32	19