

Brkovic will be given new deal

CROATIAN midfielder Ahmet Brkovic will be offered a contract until the end of the season when his current short-term deal ends next month.

Brkovic, 27, signed a three-month contract for the Hatters in October and has started 10 games since joining the Kenilworth Road club, scoring in the 3-2 FA Cup defeat at Southend.

And the ex-Leyton Orient player has impressed Hatters boss Joe Kinnear enough to be offered an extended stay.

Kinnear said: "When his three months are up I want to keep him until the end of the season if he is agreeable to that."

"When we play against teams who have three central midfield-

ers he tucks in well and helps Matthew Spring and Kevin Nicholls."

Hatters forward Liam George will go for a week's trial at Gillingham on Monday but is also considering a move to the League of Ireland with Shelbourne showing an interest in both him and midfielder Dean Brennan, who has now accepted a financial package to leave Luton.

Paul Hughes returned to the Hatters bench on Saturday after being sidelined with a cracked ankle bone since September.

And the ex-Chelsea and Southampton midfielder, who played in last week's 2-2 reserves draw at Portsmouth, could be called into action over Christmas with Nicholls nursing a swollen knee.

matchfacts

●HATTERS: Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, David Bayliss, Russell Perrett, Matthew Taylor, Ahmet Brkovic (Marvin Johnson, 61), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Jean-Louis Valois (Adrian Forbes, 80), Steve Howard, Dean Crowe (Andrew Fotiadis, 80). Subs not used: Carl Emberson, Paul Hughes.

●HARTLEPOOL: Anthony Williams, Micky Barron, Chris Westwood, Graeme Lee, Mark Robinson, Darrell

Clarke, Tommy Widdrington, Mark Tinkler, Paul Smith, Richie Humphreys, Gordon Watson (Adam Boyd, 90). Subs not used: Martin Hollund, Jonathon Bass, Jon Parkin, Anthony Sweeney.

●Shots on target: Luton 7 Hartlepool 4.

●Shots off target: Luton 8 Hartlepool 2.

●Corners: Luton 3 Hartlepool 2.

●Referee George Cain (Merseyside).

●Star man: Russell Perrett - unpromising performance.



HOW'S ABOUT THAT: Steve Howard (far right) heads in against his old club.

Picture: JANE SHERLOCK

Mighty Marv's a marvel

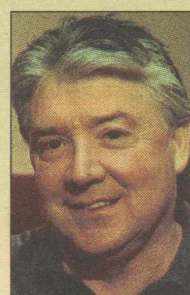
A RECORD of 10 goals in 15 seasons and 426 games has failed, unsurprisingly, to win Marvin Johnson any Golden Boot awards during his Kenilworth Road career.

Johnson's most prolific campaign came in 1992-93 when he netted three times after waiting four-and-a-half years and 75 matches to score his first senior goal in a 3-1 home defeat against Derby County.

On Saturday, however, super-sub Johnson was the Hatters' unlikely goal hero when he got his name on the scoresheet for the first time in more than three years to earn his side a 2-2 draw with Hartlepool.

Joe Kinnear sent on strikers Adrian Forbes and Andrew Fotiadis in his search for a precious equaliser, but it was ear-

Kinnear's view



We created numerous chances but, at 2-1, were always striving to get that second one. If we stop throwing them in at the other end we would get maximum points. Mark Ovendale was at fault for the goals, there's no question about that. He flapped at the first one and my grandson could have saved it. The second one was meant for a cross, but he should not have got chipped from that area.

lier replacement Johnson who secured a point on 84 minutes.

Johnson came on for ineffective Croatian midfielder Ahmet Brkovic in the 61st minute to enable left-back Matthew Taylor to push into a more advanced role, but the Hatters' longest-serving player then surged forward himself

and combined with Matthew Spring and Fotiadis before sidefooting accurately into the bottom corner from the edge of the area.

The 33-year-old defender was tasting his first league action since mid-September and said afterwards: "I was just pleased to get back involved with the team, but the lads will tell you I like to fancy myself as a goalscorer in training."

"The last one I got was against Ipswich two years ago and when I do score they tend to be special."

In fact, Johnson's right-footed effort on Saturday was the latest in a select bunch of crucial collector's items.

His goalscoring feats may be rare but four out of his last five, at least, have all been worth the wait.

All four have come in the last 10 minutes of games and he last netted in September 1998 when his last-gasp header past Richard Wright gave the Hatters a thrilling extra-time Worthington Cup victory over Ipswich Town.

The goal before that was an

81st-minute equaliser at Watford in the last derby match between the two clubs and another last-minute effort earned the Hatters an FA Cup third round replay at Bolton Wanderers in 1997.

His cool finish on Saturday saved the Hatters from defeat after they had surrendered the initiative given to them by Steve Howard's 35th-minute goal.

A poor first-half had seen only Dean Crowe go close to opening the scoring in the third minute before Howard headed in his fifth goal of the season.

The former Hartlepool striker netted against his old club after rising high to meet Jean-Louis Valois' out-swinging corner with a powerful header from eight yards.

Howard was only denied a second headed goal by a point-blank save by Pool keeper Anthony Williams four minutes later after connecting with Spring's right-wing cross into the six-yard box.

Hartlepool offered little as an attacking threat before the break and had failed to produce

a single goal attempt, either on target or off target, until the third minute of first-half stoppage time when Darrell Clarke levelled the scores.

The visitors' right-winger must have thought Christmas had come three days early when he was given the gift of an open net to slide the ball into after Mark Ovendale could only parry Paul Smith's low shot.

Hartlepool's best period of the match came early in the second-half and experienced striker Gordon Watson was unlucky not to get on the score-sheet after 56 minutes when he shot past Ovendale, only for an alert David Bayliss to charge back to his goal-line and make an excellent clearance.

But that only offered temporary respite for the Hatters, who were trailing three minutes later when Clarke scored a fortunate second goal.

The former Mansfield player's right-wing cross completely deceived Ovendale with the ball sailing over the Hatters keeper's head and finishing in the top corner.

On 67 minutes, Taylor

headed wide from Emmerson Boyce's cross before Watson almost secured victory with a similar effort after Smith's corner at the other end.

Johnson was then mobbed by ecstatic team-mates after the equaliser, but Howard missed a glorious opportunity to give his side maximum points on 89 minutes.

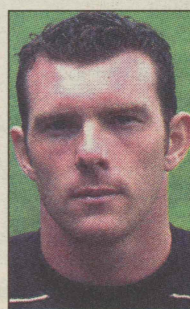
The 6ft 3in striker was sent clear on goal by substitute Forbes but blasted straight at an exposed Williams.

Afterwards, Kinnear told Howard to take a leaf out of Johnson's goalscoring book, saying: "Marvin passed the ball into the bottom corner with his right foot after a decent build-up with Matthew Spring and showed our strikers how to do it in many respects."

●Town On Tour will be running coaches to Saturday's Division Three match at Southend United.

They will leave the Maple Road car park at 12noon and you can reserve a seat at the club shop or by calling the 24-hour service line on 07960 567465.

playerwatch

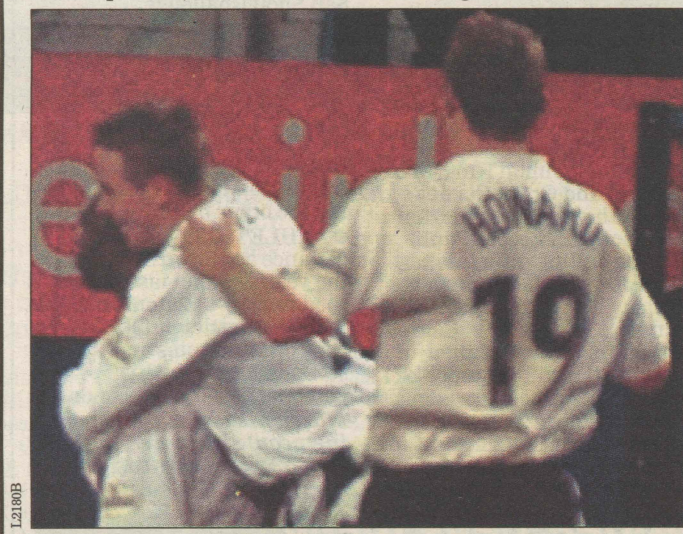


MARK OVENDALE

THIS week the spotlight falls on Hatters' goalkeeper Mark Ovendale...

- Saves: 1
- Saves/shots percentage: 25 per cent
- Crosses caught: 0
- Crosses punched: 0
- Crosses not claimed: 0
- Throws/short kicks to own player: 4
- Throws/short kicks to opposition: 0
- Throws/short kicks completion rate: 100 per cent
- Long kicks to own players: 13
- Long kicks to opposition: 15

●Long kicks completion rate: 47%
●Verdict: Mark Ovendale suffered his poorest game since replacing Carl Emberson, as is illustrated by his poor shots to saves ratio. He made one save all afternoon and even that was the parry that led to Darrell Clarke's first goal. Joe Kinnear was also critical of Ovendale's positioning for Clarke's second goal and a last-ditch clearance by David Bayliss had only prevented Gordon Watson scoring after he shot past the former Bournemouth number one.



MARV-ELLOUS: Marvin Johnson is mobbed after his goal.