

Hatters pair may have to be sold

HATTERS youngsters Matthew Taylor and Matthew Spring could be sold before the end of the season if they do not sign new deals at Luton.

Both players are out of contract in the summer when the club could run the risk of losing them for a transfer fee fixed by a tribunal.

Joe Kinnear is keen to get his asking prices if Taylor and Spring do decide to leave and said: "I've talked to Matthew Taylor's agent Jonathon Barnett and Matthew Spring's agent and would dearly love to keep both for next season."

"Taylor's agent is aiming him at Premiership and First Division clubs and I may have to address his situation sooner rather than later. If he's not staying he may have to leave before the end of the

season to get a true transfer value. I don't want to lose them in the summer and I'll make sure that doesn't happen.

"There's no friction between me and the players but both would like to better themselves and they have got the possibility of playing in Division One, or the Premiership in Taylor's case, with massive wage increases. It would be difficult to match the salary Taylor has been offered elsewhere.

"I'm saying stay with us and there's a good chance you will be playing in the first division in a couple of seasons. If it did come to a tribunal over Taylor I'd make as strong a case as possible and get written estimates of his worth from previous managers. West Brom offered us James Quinn and £500,000 just six months ago."

match facts

●SOUTHEND: Daniel Gay, Stephen Broad (David McSweeney, 32, Mark Rawle 80), Leon Cort, Phil Whelan, Damon Searle, Steven Clark, Kevin Maher, Carl Hutchings, Stuart Thurgood (Scott Forbes, 81), Tesfaye Bramble, Barrington Belgrave. Not used: Paul Sansome, Leon Johnson.

●HATTERS: Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, David Bayliss, Russell Perrett, Matthew Taylor, Adrian Forbes (Ahmet

Brkovic, 46), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Jean-Louis Valois (Ian Hillier, 46), Steve Howard, Dean Crowe. Subs not used: Carl Emberson, Marvin Johnson, Paul Hughes.

●Shots on target: Southend 8 Luton 9

●Shots off target: Southend 7 Luton 11

●Corners: Southend 4 Luton 9.

●Referee: Michael Ryan (Preston).

●Star man: Bayliss - perfect positional sense and excellent in the air.



PERFECT 10: Dean Crowe celebrates his 10th goal this season with Ahmet Brkovic. Photo: GARETH OWEN

England's top away side

LUTON TOWN went into the New Year boasting the best away record in English football.

Saturday's 2-1 win at Southend United was the Hatters' third successive victory on their travels and marked the eighth time Joe Kinnear's men have taken maximum points away from home this season.

No other side in the Nationwide League or Premiership could match that impressive tally before yesterday's New Year's Day programme and maintaining that record will be high on Kinnear's resolution list for 2002.

Top of that list, no doubt, will be promotion and Saturday's win saw the Hatters finish 2001 in the strong position of enjoying an eight-point cushion over fourth-placed Hull City in the fight for three automatic promotion spots.

The prolific Dean Crowe and explosive Matthew Taylor were on target at Roots Hall as the Hatters came back from a goal behind to clinch a 2-1 victory for the second successive match.

But Luton were unlucky not to have taken the lead before the break after forcing nine

Kinnear's view



“It was a terrific finish by Matthew Taylor to win the game and he was sensational after making the switch to midfield. He gave us more options and pace, as well as whipping in some brilliant crosses and is always the first to react in the box. I was disappointed with the way we conceded a goal. The boy did well going at Ian Hillier but Carl Hutchings was not marked in the box.”

corners all delivered by the lethal left boot of Frenchman Jean-Louis Valois.

Adrian Forbes headed wide from one of the former Lille winger's set-pieces on 18 minutes and Matthew Spring, Valois and Kevin Nicholls all tested Southend debutant Daniel Gay from long range during a busy baptism in league football.

At the other end, Tesfaye Bramble, who bagged a brace to sink the Hatters in November's FA Cup clash, warmed Mark Ovendale's hands with a long-range volley.

An alert Emmerson Boyce then helped out his goalkeeper

by clearing Leon Cort's header off the line and Damon Searle did the same for the Shrimpers on the stroke of half-time to deny David Bayliss his first goal in Hatters colours.

Kinnear made two tactical switches at half-time, replacing Forbes and Valois with Ahmet Brkovic and Ian Hillier, but it was the home side who made a better start to the second period.

Ovendale tipped over a curling long-range effort from Southend midfielder Kevin Maher on 51 minutes before Carl Hutchings broke the deadlock.

Crowe conceded possession

playerwatch



RUSSELL PERRETT

THIS week the spotlight falls on Hatters centre-back Russell Perrett..

- Shots: 0
- Passes to own player: 4
- Passes to opposition: 0
- Crosses: 0
- Pass completion rate: 100 per cent
- Dribbles: 0
- Headers: 22
- Clearances, blocks and interceptions: 12
- Tackles: 3
- Fouls committed: 1

●Fouls won: 2

●Final Verdict: Russell Perrett was once more uncompromising in the heart of the Hatters defence alongside impressive partner David Bayliss. Perrett's no-nonsense approach to defending is illustrated by his low pass count but his distribution was accurate even if it was rare. He won the aerial battle against Southend's strikers, making 22 headers, and also producing some typically crucial blocks and interceptions in his own penalty box.

before accepting his teammate's return pass and side-footing accurately into the top corner from 15 yards.

Crowe shot over from a similar position six minutes later before Taylor fired in his sixth goal of the season to win the points.

Nicholls' 83rd-minute free kick caused confusion in the home defence and Taylor was the quickest to react in the penalty box, smashing the ball into the roof of the net.

Shrimpers captain Phil Whelan came closest to snatching a point for the home side but his stooping header was safely gathered by Ovendale.

in his own half and the ball was then fed to right-winger Steven Clarke, whose blistering pace left Hillier trailing in his wake.

Clarke's accurate cross found an unmarked Hutchings, who shot firmly past Ovendale after ghosting into the Hatters penalty box.

But the Hatters' response to the set-back was spirited with Taylor, who had been pushed forward after the withdrawal of Valois, proving a constant menace on the left and delivering a series of dangerous low crosses.

Luton drew level on 67 minutes when Crowe cleverly found the energetic Taylor

Afterwards, happy Hatters boss Kinnear said: "It's nice to get our first double of the season and carry on in the same vein of form we've shown over Christmas. We've now won more away games than we have at home and we will continue to go into matches with an attack-minded attitude."

"We may have suffered on occasions from being over adventurous but the philosophy has always been the same. We've clawed our way back into the frame and it's lovely to go into the New Year in our position. If we stay injury free we've got a great chance of keeping it going."