



FROM VILLAIN TO HERO IN 161 DAYS: Steve Howard's Hatters future looked in jeopardy after a penalty bust-up with his own team-mates in York (inset) but 23 weeks and 13 goals later he's a hero. He celebrates with Ahmet Brkovic in Saturday's return match.

French striker goes on trial

MONTPELLIER striker Oliver Bogaczyk will be bidding to earn a Hatters contract against Colchester Reserves this afternoon at Kenilworth Road.

Bogaczyk, 24, has trained with the Hatters this week as Joe Kinnear looks to bolster his strike force with first-choice attackers Steve Howard and Adrian Forbes both suspended for Saturday's trip to Torquay.

Top scorer Howard is also banned for Tuesday night's home match with Leyton Orient and Kinnear has made several bids for new forwards.

Ex-Scotland international Gary McSwegan, on loan from Hearts, may be in contention for Saturday's match but is still suffering from a shoulder injury. Kinnear said:

"He trains one day, then does not train the next day and spends the next morning on the treatment table getting his shoulder massaged."

"But he'll be in the squad for every game and I'll use him if I have to."

The Hatters will also look at two Angolan internationals on Friday.

Both have been recommended by former Millwall winger George Lawrence, who is flying them into the country.

Alan Neilson, 29, became Kinnear's latest signing, joining on a free transfer from Grimsby.

The ex-Newcastle, Southampton and Fulham defender has signed until the end of the season when he could be offered a two-year deal by the Hatters.

matchfacts

● **HATTERS:** Carl Emberson, Emmerson Boyce, Alan Neilson, Chris Coyne, Matthew Taylor, Ahmet Brkovic, Aaron Skelton (Paul Hughes, 57), Matthew Spring, Jean-Louis Valois (Marvin Johnson, 64), Steve Howard, Adrian Forbes. Subs not used: Mark Owendale, Gary McSwegan, Dean Crowe.

● **YORK:** Alan Fettis, Darren Edmondson, Graham Potter, Mike Basham (Stuart Wise,

54), Gary Hobson, Chris Brass, Lee Bullock, Lee Nogan, Peter Duffield (Alex Mathie, 72), Michael Proctor, John Parkin. Subs not used: Russell Howarth, Nick Richardson, Leigh Wood.

● **Shots on target:** Luton 7 York 5.

● **Off target:** Luton 5 York 3.

● **Corners:** Luton 9 York 4.

● **Referee:** Rob Harris (Oxford).

● **Star man:** Steve Howard - can't stop scoring.

Stevie's wonder comeback!

A HUNDRED and sixty one days is a long time in football - just ask a rejuvenated Steve Howard.

The 6ft 3in forward bagged a brace to sink York City in Saturday's 2-1 victory for the Hatters exactly 23 weeks after a display against the Minstermen, described as 'disgraceful' by Joe Kinnear, had placed his Kenilworth Road career in jeopardy.

Howard flouted Kinnear's orders in September's first match between the two clubs when he missed a penalty twice and almost came to blows with his team-mates who tried, unsuccessfully, to wrestle the ball from him after his spot-kick blunder.

He was substituted in that match after continued squabbling and axed from the first-team squad for the next game.

But his aggression and muscle has been used to better effect since that dark day in Yorkshire and Saturday's double was the perfect way to exorcise the ghost of Bootham Crescent, completing the kind of transformation that has seen David Beckham go from England pariah to the country's most popular player.

Howard was hardly a crowd favourite before his York shenanigans, having waited 10 games to score a goal in open

Joe view



We've played better and not got results but Steve Howard has been in form week in, week out recently. It was important to get three points because they've had some decent results. Proctor can always get a goal and finished extremely well.

play for the Hatters and starting this season without finding the net in his first seven matches.

But Saturday's latest match-winning display saw Howard leave the pitch to chants of "Stevie," a ditty previously reserved for talismanic former centre-back Steve Davis.

"I think the supporters are beginning to see he's a half-decent player," said Hatters boss Kinnear afterwards with a hint of under-statement.

Howard's goals took his tally to eight in nine games since the

turn of the year and 13 for the season.

His performances have caused the Hatters to twice revise his goal target for the season. Kinnear had originally demanded 10 goals from Howard at the start of the campaign, but recently changed that figure to 15 and he now wants 20.

The brace was Howard's first since joining the Hatters and he went close three times to completing a hat-trick in the last 10 minutes.

But it was York forward Michael Proctor, a player highly-rated by Hatters boss Kinnear, who struck first in Saturday's clash.

The on-loan Sunderland striker forced Carl Emberson into a 10th-minute save and then fired the visitors in front after Matthew Spring had warmed Alan Fettis' hands with a low drive at the other end.

Proctor was left in splendid isolation on the left-wing by a careless Hatters defence and capitalised fully, cutting inside before curling an unstoppable shot into Emberson's top corner from the edge of the area.

Two minutes later, the visitors were equally as neglectful when Emmerson Boyce foraged down the right flank unchallenged and delivered an accurate cross that

Howard headed into the top corner from five yards.

Adrian Forbes, chosen ahead of Dean Crowe and Gary McSwegan to partner Howard, then shot over on 25 minutes before Fettis kept Ahmet Brkovic off the scoresheet with an instinctive reflex save.

The Croatian midfielder is clearly under instructions to get into the opposition's penalty box at every attacking opportunity and met a Jean-Louis Valois cross, only to be denied by Fettis from point-blank range.

York almost regained the lead in extraordinary circumstances in first-half injury-time when a miscue by Chris Coyne saw the ball fly off his toe end from 35 yards and just over Emberson's bar with the Hatters keeper well beaten.

The Hatters survived that scare and forged in front five minutes into the second period when Howard used his knee to meet Forbes' right-wing cross and his clumsy effort squirmed under Fettis' body.

Forbes had the ball in the net again seconds later but his effort was disallowed after he handled just before shooting.

York midfielder Lee Bullock wasted his side's best chance of a point on 55 minutes when he shot woefully wide after bursting purposefully into the penalty box.

The Hatters then searched

for an assuring third goal and, on 71 minutes, Brkovic broke clear from the halfway line but lacked the pace to leave the visitors defence behind and his eventual chip was ambitious and easily saved.

Matthew Taylor tested Fettis on 72 minutes from 25 yards and curled a low free-kick wide after Marvin Johnson's replacement of Valois had seen him pushed into midfield.

Howard's three late chances to clinch a personal treble saw him shoot on the turn at Fettis, head over from Brkovic's corner and, in injury-time, fire in a goalbound effort that was bravely blocked by York sub Stuart Wise.

The last opportunity had been crafted by Brkovic and

Paul Hughes, who impressed as the Hatters' midfield anchorman after replacing Aaron Skelton on 57 minutes.

● **TOWN On Tour** will run coaches to Torquay on Saturday, leaving Maple Road at 8am.

You can reserve a seat at the club shop or by ringing 07960 567465 after 4pm with prices £16 for adult supporters club members, £18 for non-members and £14 for concessions.

● **HATTERS** players David Bayliss, Kevin Nicholls and Ahmet Brkovic will be the guest speakers at a Supporters Club evening on Thursday, March 7 in the Eric Morecambe Lounge.

Tickets are on sale at £2 for Supporters Club members and £5 for non-members.

playerwatch

ALL EYES ON NEW DEFENDER ALAN NEILSON

- **Shots:** 0
- **Passes to own player:** 11
- **Passes to opposition:** 2
- **Crosses:** 0
- **Pass completion rate:** 84.6 per cent
- **Dribbles ball retained:** 0
- **Dribbles ball lost:** 1
- **Dribble completion rate:** 0 per cent
- **Headers:** 14
- **Clearances, blocks, interceptions:** 4
- **Tackles:** 7
- **Free kicks won:** 0
- **Free kicks conceded:** 1

● **Offsides:** 0

● **FINAL VERDICT:** German-born Welsh international Alan Neilson enjoyed a solid debut in the centre of defence. The most impressive element of his game was the awareness that saw him execute seven successful tackles. His distribution was also reliable and he proved able in the air. Joe Kinnear said: "He's nice and tidy and can read the game. He prefers to play at right back but I forced him to play in the centre. I'm sure he'll be a good acquisition and will get better as we go along."