

Goal illustrates the gulf in class

04/02

TORQUAY United may have escaped a repeat of the 5-1 drubbing inflicted at Kenilworth Road earlier in the season, but the gulf in class between these top and bottom Third Division sides was there for all to see in this return at Plainmoor yesterday.

The Hatters, pretty certain for automatic promotion from Division Three along with champions in waiting Plymouth Argyle, had it in abundance.

The Gulls, thanking their lucky stars that Halifax Town are so poor at the other end of the table, didn't.

That was it in a nutshell.

In fact, the difference between the sides was summed up in the move that led to the only goal after 21 minutes, scored by Croatian born midfielder Ahmet Brkovic.

United were sucked to one side of the pitch when the ball was suddenly switched to the other. And there was Brkovic to round goalkeeper Kevin Dearden after central midfielder

▼ TORQUAY UTD 0 LUTON TOWN 1 by John Hilton at Plainmoor

Kevin Nicholls had controlled the crossfield pass before sliding the ball through for his team-mate to score.

Luton had come within a whisker of springing the United offside trap on two occasions before that so the Gulls should have known what to expect instead of being caught out in such a naive manner. Especially since they left Nicholls completely unmarked when the ball arrived at his feet.

United were also disappointing up front, despite the ceaseless running of makeshift striker Chris Brandon. There was nothing from either flank in terms of decent crosses and centre forward Richard Logan looked out of his depth against the towering Russell Parrett and Chris Coyne in the centre of Luton's defence.

In contrast, the Hatters moved forward more as a team, and would have changed around at half-time 2-0 up before Dearden's magnificent save in the 40th minute.

Brkovic was again on the end of the chance following a ball played

into the near post by left midfielder player Matt Taylor, but Dearden, at full stretch, guided the ball to safety for a fabulous save low down to his right.

Torquay introduced substitute Marcus Richardson for the out of sorts Logan nine minutes into the second half, and was booked within eight minutes for a challenge on left back Marvin Johnson.

He still didn't get any change out of Perrett and Coyne, however, and it was Luton who carved out the best chance of the second half when Perrett was unmarked on the far post to meet a Dean Crowe corner.

He seemed surprised that Alex Russell missed with an attempted headed clearance, but the manner in which Perrett cupped his head in his hands was the sort of body language to confirm that he knew he had missed a sitter.

Not that Luton had any difficulty clinging to their slender lead, despite the fact United threw on substitutes David Graham for Gregory Goodridge and Jimmy Benefield for

STAR RATINGS

Dearden	★★★
Hazell	★★★★
Hankin	★★★
L Russell	★★★
Holmes	★★★
Goodridge	★★
Rees	★★
A Russell	★★★
Hill	★★
Logan	★★
Brandon	★★★
Substitutes: Richardson	
★★ (for Logan, 54), Graham (for Goodridge, 75)	
Benefield (for Rees, 77)	
Not used: Northmore, Tully	

Luton: Emerson, Spring, Perrett, Johnson (Boyce), Nicholls, Coyne, Taylor, Crowe, Brkovic (Hughes 45), McSwegan (Velos 81), Neilson. Not used: Ovendale (gk), Hillier.

Scorers: Luton - Brkovic 20.

Bookings: Torquay - Richardson 62, Rees 76; Luton - Hughes 57, Boyce 90.

Referee: D Crick (Worcester Park) ★★★

Attendance: 3,280.

★ **Star Man:** Rueben Hazell - Cool, calm and collected in defence

skipper Jason Rees in the last quarter of an hour.

Graham did put Brandon in for one chance that he might have made better use of, but Brandon snatched at the chance, the ball wide and Luton manager Joe Kinnear was able to leave Devon with a huge smile on his face having made up ground on Plymouth Argyle.



▲ **CLASH:** United's Goodridge and Luton scorer Brkovic

Picture: Steve Porter