



GOAL! Steve Howard (left) celebrates with Matthew Spring after scoring his 15th of the season last night. Picture: JOANNA CROSS

Super seven for Hatters!

LUTON 3 EXETER 0
DAVE FLETT reports from
Kenilworth Road

LUTON Town won their seventh successive match last night after Steve Howard's brace and a Matthew Taylor header clinched a comfortable victory over Exeter City.

The Hatters are chasing a club record of nine straight wins, with Kidderminster Harriers and Halifax Town the only teams now standing between Joe Kinnear's men and the impressive tally set in 1977 by a side managed by Harry Haslam.

Howard struck on 27 and 65 minutes, with Premiership target Taylor scoring his 10th goal of the season to secure the points after 79 minutes.

Jean-Louis Valois was recalled to the Hatters starting line-up in place of injured club captain Marvin Johnson, with Matthew Taylor returning to left-back.

Exeter included two strikers in their squad and they had both had brief spells at Kenilworth Road.

Former Arsenal apprentice Paul Read started the match, with former Manchester United trainee Graeme Tomlinson on the bench.

Hatters keeper Carl Emberson was called into action after just three minutes, making a comfortable save from Christian Roberts' hopeful long-range volley.

Howard then blazed over on the turn at the other end and Adrian Forbes headed narrowly wide on six minutes after Kevin Nicholls' free-kick from the right.

Both sides were attempting to play

match facts

● **LUTON TOWN:** Carl Emberson, Alan Neilson, Russell Perrett, Chris Coyne, Matthew Taylor, Adrian Forbes (sub 71 mins, Paul Hughes), Kevin Nicholls, Matthew Spring, Jean-Louis Valois (sub 46 mins, David Bayliss), Steve Howard, Dean Crowe. Other subs: Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, Andrew Fotiadis.

● **EXETER CITY:** Arjan Van Heusden, Graeme Power, Paul Buckle, Chris Curran, Jay Richardson, Martin Barlow, Andy Roscoe (sub 83 mins, Geoff Breslan), Paul Read (sub 70 mins, Steve Flack), Barry McConnell, Alex Watson, Christian Roberts. Other subs: Stuart Fraser, Nell Whitworth, Graeme Tomlinson.

● **Referee:** S Tomlin (East Sussex).

● **Attendance:** 6,327.

● **Top Hatter:** Kevin Nicholls – the midfield inspiration.

attractive football in the opening stages, but it was Hatters who made the breakthrough on 27 minutes when Howard netted his 15th goal of the season.

Nicholls' free-kick from the right found both Howard and Chris Coyne unmarked at the far post.

But the 6ft 3in striker outjumped his Australian team-mate to head in from close range and almost seemed surprised with the ease with which he was allowed to find the net.

Taylor sent Howard clear on goal moments later, but a heavy touch saw Exeter keeper Arjan Van Heusden smother at the Hatters' forward's feet.

Valois was replaced at half-time by David Bayliss, who went in at right-back with Alan Neilson switching to the left and Taylor moving into

midfield. Coyne received the club's 100th card of the season when he was cautioned for a foul on Roberts, who picked himself up to fire a powerful free-kick inches over Emberson's bar.

Matthew Spring hit the post for the Hatters on 56 minutes, but his effort would not have counted because of an offside flag.

Van Heusden then pulled off a fine save to deny Forbes after a low corner by the impressive Nicholls.

The Hatters doubled the lead on 68 minutes when Howard took his season's tally to 16.

Coyne's initial header from Nicholls corner was blocked by the visitors' defence, but when the ball was returned into the box, the Hatters' defender headed the ball into Howard's direction.

Van Heusden saved Howard's poor first effort but was powerless to stop the Hatters' top scorer netting from the rebound.

Kinnear introduced Paul Hughes for Forbes six minutes later, while Exeter brought on target man and former boxer Steve Flack in a final effort to unsettle the solid home defence.

The Hatters made it 3-0 on 79 minutes when Nicholls' perfectly-floated free kick was met by Taylor, whose header looped over a helpless Van Heusden.

Howard went agonisingly close to claiming his first hat-trick for the Hatters when his powerful drive from 20 yards narrowly cleared Van Heusden's crossbar.

His striking partner Dean Crowe then stooped low to head over after another accurate free-kick delivered by Nicholls.

Talk of the Town – the latest Hatters news is on pages 78 & 79.