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Wednesday, April 3, 2002

HATTERS IN PARTY MOOD AFTER PROMOTION AND A CRACKING, EIGHT-GOAL EASTER

GLORY BOYS ALL IN A LINE: The Luton Town players and officials join hands in celebration after smashing Mansfield 5-3.

Picture: GARETH OWEN

Record-breakers!

match facts

HATTERS: Carl Emberson, Emerson Boyce, Chris Coyne, Marvin Johnson, Matthew Taylor, Peter Holmes, Matthew Spring, Kevin Nicholls, Jean-Louis Valois (Adrian Forbes, 83), Steve Howard, Dean Crowe (Steve Kabba, 83). Subs not used: Mark Owendale, Aaron Sialton, Ian Hillier.

MANSFIELD: Kevin Pilkington, Bobby Hassell, Les Robinson (Stuart Riddington, 52), Adam Barrett, Jamie Clarke, Adam Murray, Lee Williamson, Craig Disley, Wayne Corde (Chris Greenacre, 35), Scott Sellers, Andy White. Subs not used: Michael Bingham, David Kelly, Steven Bradley.

Goals on target: Luton 9 Mansfield 5.

Off target: Luton 5 Mansfield 3.

Referee: John Branchwood (Lichfield).

Star man: Steve Howard - constant goal threat.

FOUR-MIDABLE Luton Town broke another two club records after Easter Monday's exhilarating 5-3 home win over Mansfield.

Steve Howard (2), Jean-Louis Valois, Dean Crowe and Kevin Nicholls were all on target as the Hatters set their third and fourth records of an increasingly incredible season.

Three more points took the season's tally to 90 for Joe Kinnear's men and that beats the previous best, set by David Pleat's famous Division Two championship-winning side of 1982, writes **DAVE FLETT**.

Five goals also saw the Hatters reach 90 for the season to break a post-war record of 89 that had belonged to Allan Brown's 1968 Division Four champions.

Alec Stock's 1969-70 side were the first team to lose a record this season with their



Joe view

It was a result for the fans. They are not an easy team to play against and have got some great players but have lost their way a bit. Strikers and midfield players from both sides were definitely on top and nobody wanted the whistle to go bar me.

most away league wins in a season tally of 10 now smashed by the class of 2002's 13 on the road this campaign.

Kinnear's team have also, of course, set a new best for consecutive victories with the Mansfield mauling marking an 11th straight success, which is already two better than the previous record held by Harry

Haslam's 1977 side. It is, therefore, little wonder that the Hatters, who clinched promotion at Swansea on Saturday, were given a rousing reception by an appreciative home crowd and a post-match ovation after serving up another afternoon of entertaining football.

Club captain Marvin Johnson deputised at centre-back

for flu victim Russell Perrett in Monday's team with Emerson Boyce impressing at right-back in place of the injured David Bayliss.

Peter Holmes was also given only his third start of the season after scoring as a substitute at Swansea and played on the right side of midfield.

Luton responded excellently to the party atmosphere and went ahead thanks to Valois' sixth goal of the season.

Howard ran at the visitors' defence after receiving the ball from Crowe and then fed the overlapping Frenchman, who shot low across keeper Kevin Pilkington and into the bottom corner from 10 yards.

But the Stags equalised almost straight from the kick-off when Andy White capitalised on a Matthew Taylor error to round an exposed Emberson and on-loan Derby midfielder Adam Murray found the empty net.

The Hatters went back in front on 21 minutes when Crowe escaped his marker to apply a deft touch to Valois' mis-hit free-kick and guide the ball into the bottom corner.

Boyce's shirt was then tugged by Mansfield winger Wayne Corde and skipper Nicholls, as he has with his three previous spot-kicks this season, sidefooted confidently and firmly into the keeper's bottom right-hand corner.

The rampant Hatters added a fourth on 34 minutes when Chris Coyne's perfect diagonal pass found Taylor charging down the left flank.

Taylor then wriggled his way past Mansfield right-back Bobby Hassell before delivering an accurate cross for top scorer Howard to meet with a brave diving header.

A shell-shocked Mansfield

side were given a glimmer of hope four minutes before the break when veteran midfielder Scott Sellers rolled back the years with an exquisite goal.

Sellers, now 36, spotted that Emberson had strayed slightly off his line before sending a delicious chip sailing over the flat-footed Hatters keeper.

But the home side restored their three-goal cushion on 49 minutes, Howard shooting into an empty net when Pilkington could only parry Valois' curling effort after some nifty footwork by the Frenchman and Crowe had headed the ball into his striking partner's path.

Pilkington deprived Howard of his first senior hat-trick moments later when he saved at the 6ft 3in striker's feet after a powerful run into the box.

White then sidefooted wide of an empty net from two yards and star striker Chris Greenacre, who surprisingly started the game on the bench, rounded Emberson on 65 minutes, only to hit an upright with the goal gaping.

Valois had a 60th-minute piledriver saved before making way for on-loan striker Steve Kabba, who enjoyed a sprightly seven-minute substitute appearance.

The Crystal Palace reserve shot wide and forced a near-post save in injury time and certainly looked worth a longer look in the Hatters' remaining three matches.

Greenacre grabbed a late consolation for the Stags when he capitalised on casual defending by Taylor.

The Hatters' left-back attempted to control Sellers' cross into the six-yard box instead of making a first-time clearance and Greenacre pounced to end an eight-game goal drought.

And here's to the next major milestone...

HISTORY-making Hatters have a fifth club record in sight this weekend when they travel to Hull City.

Joe Kinnear's men have already got more points, clinched more away victories and won more successive league games than any other side in the club's 117-year history.

Saturday's 5-3 victory over Mansfield also meant the Hatters broke the post-war club record for most goals in a season.

The previous best had belonged to the 1967/68 side that included current

youth coach John Moore. Now the new target at Boothferry Park is to secure a record-breaking fifth successive away win.

Kinnear has also refused to concede the title to Plymouth, who lost 1-0 at Hartlepool on Monday, saying: "We're aiming for 99 points and they deserve to be champions if they beat that. We did Cheltenham a favour by beating Mansfield and now I'll ring my old pal Steve Cotterill and ask him to return the compliment when they play at Plymouth."


SMASHING: John Moore has seen record broken.

Champagne Hatters...page 26

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