

# Hatters go top as Plymouth stutter

Hull City 0 Luton Town 4

**CLASSIC** finishing took the Hatters to yet another record-extending victory at Boothferry Park yesterday and to the top of the league as former leaders Plymouth faltered.

Steve Howard was the hero with his first ever hat-trick and simply wouldn't let the match ball out of his grasp as the squad once again celebrated in front of a host of delirious away fans.

This Hull outfit were a shadow of the side that won at Kenilworth Road in November in front of their new manager, Jan Molby. They had a play-off place to chase but threw away that chance with some poor defending.

The Tigers' central defenders were absent without leave in the 24th minute to allow Howard to head the opener from Matthew Taylor's pin-point cross. A quarter of an hour later Dean Crowe made it two when he cashed in on a short Jason Van Blerk back-header but never looked like reaching his goalkeeper.

The Hatters had probably done enough at this stage against a demoralised City and relaxed after the break. But Howard still had enough ambition to thump in two more goals to complete the rout.

There was no sign of that domination at the start when Hull were marginally the better side.

Former Bolton midfielder Richard Sneekes caused Carl Emberson some discomfort with a 25 yard power drive, but the Town keeper was able to get his body behind the ball.

The Town hit back when Jean-Louis Valois jinked his way through the home defence only to hit a weak shot that Paul Musselwhite saved.

Central defender Nicky Mohan put in a goal bound header after 21 minutes that Emmerson Boyce did well to head off the line, Kyle Lightbourne could only head the follow up over the bar.

Howard showed him how to finish shortly afterwards.

A lovely Valois pass encouraged Taylor to attack down the left and his quality centre presented Howard with his 21st goal of the season.

Valois almost made it two when he raced clear, only to put an attempted chip wide.

The second wasn't long in coming, with the City defence melting by the minute. Taylor's long high cross-field ball out of defence found Van Blerk wanting, Crowe gained control from his weak back-header and was able to



■ Steve Howard, above, celebrates the first of his three strikes  
■ Emmerson Boyce, right, challenges for the ball

dribble the ball past a weak challenge from the keeper.

The Town took their foot off the pedal in the second half but the only danger the home side created came from a deflected Lightbourne shot that Russell Perrett blocked at full stretch to deny the incoming Gary Alexander.

The Town however, were too good for their hosts and Howard proved the point in the 79th and 89th minute.

When Taylor made a splendid run down the left and crossed low from the by-line, Howard took it in his stride to slam Luton's third and he added to that a minute from time by taking a neat through-ball round Musselwhite to net from an acute angle as the Hatters took their winning run to eleven consecutive games and notched the 29th win of a remarkable season.

**Luton Town:** Emberson, Boyce, Perrett, Coyne, Taylor, Holmes (Hughes 46), Spring, Nicholls, Valois (Johnson 70), Howard, Crowe (Forbes 83). Subs not used: Ovendale (GK), Kabba.

Attendance: 9379.

Luton Man of the Match: Steve Howard.



## NATIONWIDE DIVISION THREE

|               |   |                |   |
|---------------|---|----------------|---|
| Halifax       | 0 | Hartlepool     | 2 |
| Hull City     | 0 | Luton          | 4 |
| Kidderminster | 1 | Lincoln        | 1 |
| Macclesfield  | 1 | Cheltenham     | 0 |
| Mansfield     | 2 | Bristol Rovers | 0 |
| Oxford        | 1 | Leyton Orient  | 1 |
| Plymouth      | 0 | Southend       | 0 |
| Rochdale      | 3 | Darlington     | 1 |
| Scunthorpe    | 1 | Rushden        | 1 |
| Shrewsbury    | 1 | Carlisle       | 0 |
| Swansea       | 0 | York           | 1 |

|                | P         | W         | D        | L        | F         | A         | Pts       |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Luton</b>   | <b>44</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>94</b> | <b>48</b> | <b>93</b> |
| Plymouth       | 43        | 28        | 9        | 6        | 63        | 27        | 93        |
| Cheltenham     | 42        | 20        | 14       | 8        | 63        | 45        | 74        |
| Mansfield      | 43        | 22        | 7        | 14       | 67        | 56        | 73        |
| Rochdale       | 43        | 19        | 14       | 10       | 59        | 48        | 71        |
| Rushden & D    | 44        | 19        | 13       | 12       | 65        | 49        | 70        |
| Scunthorpe     | 44        | 18        | 14       | 12       | 72        | 54        | 68        |
| Shrewsbury     | 44        | 19        | 10       | 15       | 62        | 51        | 67        |
| Hartlepool     | 44        | 18        | 11       | 15       | 65        | 47        | 65        |
| Kidderminster  | 44        | 18        | 9        | 17       | 54        | 46        | 63        |
| Hull           | 43        | 16        | 11       | 16       | 53        | 46        | 59        |
| Southend       | 44        | 15        | 12       | 17       | 51        | 52        | 57        |
| Macclesfield   | 44        | 14        | 11       | 18       | 41        | 52        | 56        |
| Exeter         | 43        | 14        | 11       | 18       | 47        | 70        | 53        |
| Carlisle       | 42        | 12        | 14       | 16       | 49        | 52        | 50        |
| Darlington     | 43        | 13        | 11       | 19       | 55        | 65        | 50        |
| York           | 42        | 14        | 8        | 20       | 48        | 65        | 50        |
| Swansea        | 44        | 13        | 11       | 20       | 50        | 68        | 50        |
| Torquay        | 43        | 12        | 13       | 18       | 42        | 57        | 49        |
| Leyton O       | 44        | 12        | 12       | 20       | 53        | 70        | 48        |
| Oxford         | 44        | 11        | 14       | 19       | 52        | 58        | 47        |
| Bristol Rovers | 43        | 11        | 11       | 21       | 38        | 54        | 44        |
| Lincoln        | 44        | 10        | 14       | 20       | 42        | 60        | 44        |
| Halifax        | 44        | 7         | 12       | 25       | 33        | 78        | 33        |