

Ahm the man

STEVENAGE 3 LUTON TOWN 4

DAVE FLETT reports
from Broadhall Way

A SENSATIONAL six minute hat-trick by makeshift striker Ahmet Brkovic saw Luton Town win a seven-goal LDV Trophy Vans Trophy thriller at Stevenage last night.

Brkovic was playing up front only because of an injury crisis that has left the Hatters with just two fit senior strikers. But his three goals between 54 and 60 minutes booked his team a place in the competition's third round draw.

Tony Thorpe was also on target for the Hatters, who twice fell behind to their non-league Hertfordshire neighbours.

Only Kevin Nicholls, Thorpe and Peter Holmes were retained in Joe Kinnear's starting line-up from the side that drew 0-0 against Port Vale on Saturday.

But teenage defenders Joe Deeney and Kevin Foley were the only Hatters players in the team without previous football league experience.

Stevenage included ex-Hatters Stuart Fraser and Jude Stirling in their side.

The Hatters fell behind on six minutes after failing miserably to deal with a Stirling long throw.

Keeper Carl Emberson's weak punch from the 6ft 3in defender's throw hit Nicholls on the back and floated into an unguarded goal.

It was an embarrassing start for the Hatters and Emberson had to be alert to stop Richard Scott doubling the home side's lead on 15 minutes with a volley

match facts

STEVENAGE: Mark Westhead, Simon Travis, Stuart Fraser, Simon Wormull (Kirk Jackson 68), Richard Howell (Michael Blackwood 46), Louis Riddle, Jude Stirling, Jack Midson (Jean-Michel Sigere 57), Richard Pacquette, Richard Scott, Gary MacDonald. Subs not used: Phil Wilson, George Boyd.

LUTON TOWN: Carl Emberson, Aaron Skelton, Kevin Nicholls (Michael Leary 46), Tony Thorpe, Ahmet Brkovic, Peter Holmes, Paul Hughes, Lee Mansell (Matthew Judge 46), Kevin Foley (Marvin Johnson 70), Alan Kimble, Joe Deeney. Subs not used: Mark Ovendale, Leon Barnett.

REFEREE: P. Rejer.

ATTENDANCE: 2,601

TOP HATTER: Ahmet Brkovic.

from the edge of the box.

Holmes had the Hatters' first shot of the night on 18 minutes but his low long-range drive was turned behind for a corner by home keeper Mark Westhead.

Scott then sent a 25-yard effort whistling over before Thorpe scored his third goal of the season to put the visitors back on level terms after 32 minutes.

The 28-year-old striker displayed all his opportunist ability to meet Nicholls' cross with a clever looping header that sailed over Westhead and finished just inside the Stevenage keeper's post.

Home striker Richard Pacquette went close to regaining the lead for his side on 38 minutes but headed Scott's cross narrowly wide.

Pacquette then missed a bet-

ter opportunity when he fired straight at Emberson before Travis brushed the top of Luton's cross bar with a mishit cross.

Pacquette eventually fired Stevenage back in front during first-half stoppage time when he turned Aaron Skelton far too easily before firing his fierce shot past an exposed Emberson from 15 yards.

The Hatters started the second half in brighter fashion with Thorpe's header after a Holmes corner bouncing off the top of Westhead's crossbar on 49 minutes.

Brkovic scored his first goal of the evening five minutes later. Teenage substitute Matthew Judge's intelligent flick after a Holmes pass released Brkovic, who shot low past Westhead.

The diminutive Croatian put Luton in front on 56 minutes when he side-footed in after Paul Hughes' accurate cross into the penalty box.

Brkovic then volleyed inches wide from 25 yards moments later before completing his sensational six-minute hat-trick on the hour mark.

Thorpe was denied a shooting chance by Gary MacDonald's block but Brkovic seized on the loose ball to fire confidently into Westhead's bottom corner from 12 yards.

Spirited Stevenage pulled an excellent goal back on 70 minutes with Scott's curling low free kick. Substitute Jean-Michel Sigere's header then brushed the top of the netting as the home side looked to force extra time.

Emberson then pulled off a terrific save to deny MacDonald in injury time.



IN TOUCH: Luton's Tony Thorpe and former Hatter Jude Stirling in action at Stevenage last night.
Picture: GARETH OWEN