

By Asa Bartoft

STRIKER Steve Howard had his way with poor Wycombe as Luton continued to maintain their rich promotion form.

The front man whose form has been rewarded with 33 goals in 12 months earned praise from delighted manager Joe Kinnear.

He said: "We are not the same side when Steve doesn't play. In the last three games he stuck in four goals that were all crucial."

The Hatters manager continued: "It's been a great Christmas, the games have come fast and furious and we have gradually run out of players but we have battled through and picked up seven important points.

Despondent Wycombe manager Lawrie Sanchez admitted that perhaps things haven't gone as well as expected with his side having now lost four of their last five games.

He said: "It hasn't been the season we hoped for, but teams like Rochdale who have been in the league for over 100 years and not been out of the bottom division have to face it as we do this is what football is all about.

"I hope this season ends up as one of those in between seasons where you can't always be top but you don't want to be bottom."

The stunning Boxing Day victory over Cardiff certainly lifted Luton and it required a desperate lunge from Chairboy's keeper

Howard's first-half 02/03 double seals win

Frank Talia to deny Howard within the first two minutes.

The stopper was forced to move quickly to fist away Ahmet Brcovic's corner was pleased to see a Dean Crowe volley whiz over his bar.

Wycombe's Spanish born striker Jonny Dixon thumped an 18-yard shot just wide on nine minutes as the home side countered.

Luton were fortunate on 12 minutes to see a vicious Steve Brown 25-yard free kick thunder back off the cross-bar to safety.

Luton returned to snatch the lead on 21 with Howard shooting his 13th of the season.

With the home defenders looking uncertain the ball was allowed to bounce giving Howard a free shot at goal that he took with vigour.

Wycombe sought to find an equaliser but on 34 minutes Howard struck again rising from the pack to glance a long throw over Talia.

Wycombe tried to push their visitors back, and their attacking prowess rewarded on 65 when the Luton defenders failed to clear a cross and Dixon was on hand to tap home.