

Destroyed!

LUTON TOWN 1 BLACKPOOL 3

DAVE FLETT reports from
Kenilworth Road

HATTERS' play-off rivals Blackpool leapfrogged their hosts in the Division Two table at Kenilworth Road last night.

Just like at Bloomfield Road back in August, the Hatters were given a footballing lesson by Steve McMahon's men.

Luton lost 5-2 at Blackpool and were just as comprehensively beaten at home, with hat-trick hero John Murphy and the unstoppable Martin Bullock the Seaside's chief destroyers.

Joe Kinnear made one change from the side that started Saturday's match at Port Vale, with Dean Crowe included in the starting line-up at the expense of Paul Hughes.

But Crowe spent much of the first-half operating as an orthodox right-sided midfielder rather than a third attacker as Blackpool looked to raid down both flanks.

Matthew Spring made a tigerish start to the game, but his perfectly-timed strong tackle on Mike Flynn after just 23 seconds saw referee Grant Hegley wrongly issue a yellow card.

Hatters top scorer Steve Howard ran at former Blackburn and Scotland defender Colin Hendry on three minutes before laying the ball to Tony Thorpe, who sent a curling effort narrowly wide from the edge of the area.

Crowe then became the second man to enter Mr Hegley's book on nine minutes for Luton's second foul of the match

match facts

LUTON TOWN: Mark Ovendale, Emmerson Boyce, Chris Willmott, Chris Coyne, Alan Neilson, Ahmet Brkovic (sub 72 mins, Ian Hiller), Matthew Spring, Kevin Nicholls, Dean Crowe, Steve Howard, Tony Thorpe. Other subs: Paul Hughes, Alan Kimble, Carl Griffiths, Carl Emberson.

BLACKPOOL: Phil Barnes, Simon Grayson, Mike Flynn, John Murphy, Scott Taylor, Danny Cold, Keith Southern, Paul Evans, Colin Hendry (sub 73 mins, Chris Clarke), Leam Richardson, Martin Bullock. Other subs: Richie Wellens, Ben Thornley, Richard Walker, Andrew Lonergan.

REFEREE: Grant Hegley (Herts).

ATTENDANCE: 6,563.

TOP HATTER: Tony Thorpe – always a menace to Blackpool.

– a late challenge on Leam Richardson.

The visitors took the lead a minute later when Martin Bullock, who terrorised Hatters' left-back Alan Neilson throughout the first-half with his dribbling skills, slipped the ball to striker John Murphy.

He then sent a low shot inside Mark Ovendale's near post.

Blackpool's passing was crisper and their movement sharper than the home side in the first-half and Richardson went close to doubling the lead.

Chances then fell to Chris Coyne and Chris Willmott at the other end but, sadly, for the Hatters both centre-backs produced typical defender's efforts and blazed wildly off target from inside the penalty box.

Thorpe's trickery looked like Luton's best source of an equaliser before the break and his intricate footwork created the space for a shot from 15 yards that flashed just wide.

The outstanding Bullock continued where he left off after the interval, waltzing past Neilson on 47 minutes before crossing to Scott Taylor, whose goalbound shot was headed over the bar by Emmerson Boyce.

Thorpe equalised a minute later when he controlled Crowe's low right-wing cross before guiding a slick shot on the turn past Blackpool keeper Phil Barnes' outstretched right arm. But the Seaside's regained the lead on 52 minutes with Bullock the inevitable provider.

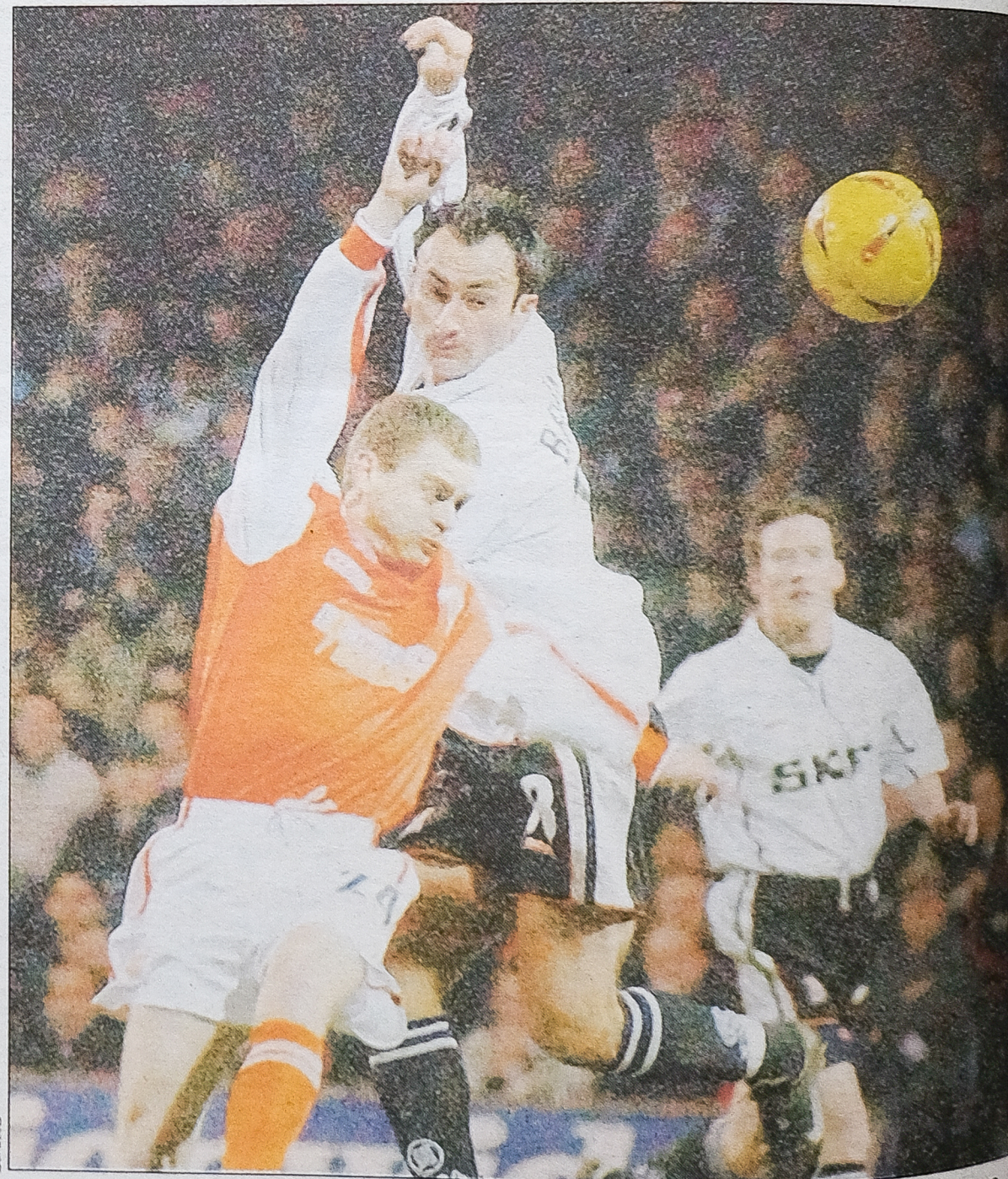
The former Barnsley midfielder danced past Ahmet Brkovic and left the tormented Neilson on his backside before crossing for Murphy, who headed over Ovendale.

Blackpool almost added a third goal seven minutes later after Ovendale spilled the ball trying to prevent Willmott from conceding a corner. His mistake gifted possession to Taylor, but his shot from an acute angle was cleared off the line by Coyne.

Neilson finally stopped Bullock on 60 minutes but not in a legal fashion and was booked.

Simon Grayson then cleared Howard's looping header off the line and Barnes kept out Nicholls' low drive from the follow-up.

But Murphy completed his hat-trick on 74 minutes when Taylor raced on to Bullock's pass, skipped past Ovendale and played a square ball for Murphy to tap into an empty net.



REACH FOR IT! Midfielder Ahmet Brkovic in the thick of the action for Hatters against Blackpool at Kenilworth Road last night.
Picture: JOANNA CROSS