



Howard ends his drought to clinch deserved point

02/03

SUPER striker Steve Howard grabbed a brace as the Hatters made a welcome return to form against promotion-chasing Bristol City.

The game also featured a shock debut for teenager Robert Beckwith, thrown in at the deep end when Mark Ovendale broke down during the pre-match warm-up.

He gave a good account of himself as Luton looked to end their season with a flourish rather than simply fade away after the disappointment of missing out on a play-off place.

With Luton's injury-list now reaching epidemic proportions, the Hatters were dealt a blow before the game started.

Ovendale felt a recurrence of the hip injury that has plagued him for much of the season.

With Carl Emberson already missing through injury, there was a sensational debut for youth team goalkeeper, Beckwith, 18, who has been on the bench three times before without being needed.

As Ovendale limped off, Kinnear approached referee Graham Salisbury for permission to name Beckwith's understudy Dean Brill as one of the substitutes.

Hatters were robbed of Chris Coyne in defence and he was replaced by Alan Neilson, and there was a surprising recall up front for Carl Griffiths, getting a belated first league start of the season.

Luton needed to put the fizz back into a season that was rapidly going flat and Howard got the Easter celebrations off with a bang with a goal in the first minute.

Some good work in the corner between Sol Davies and Matthew Spring left the latter free to cross with his left foot for the imposing presence of Howard at the back post.

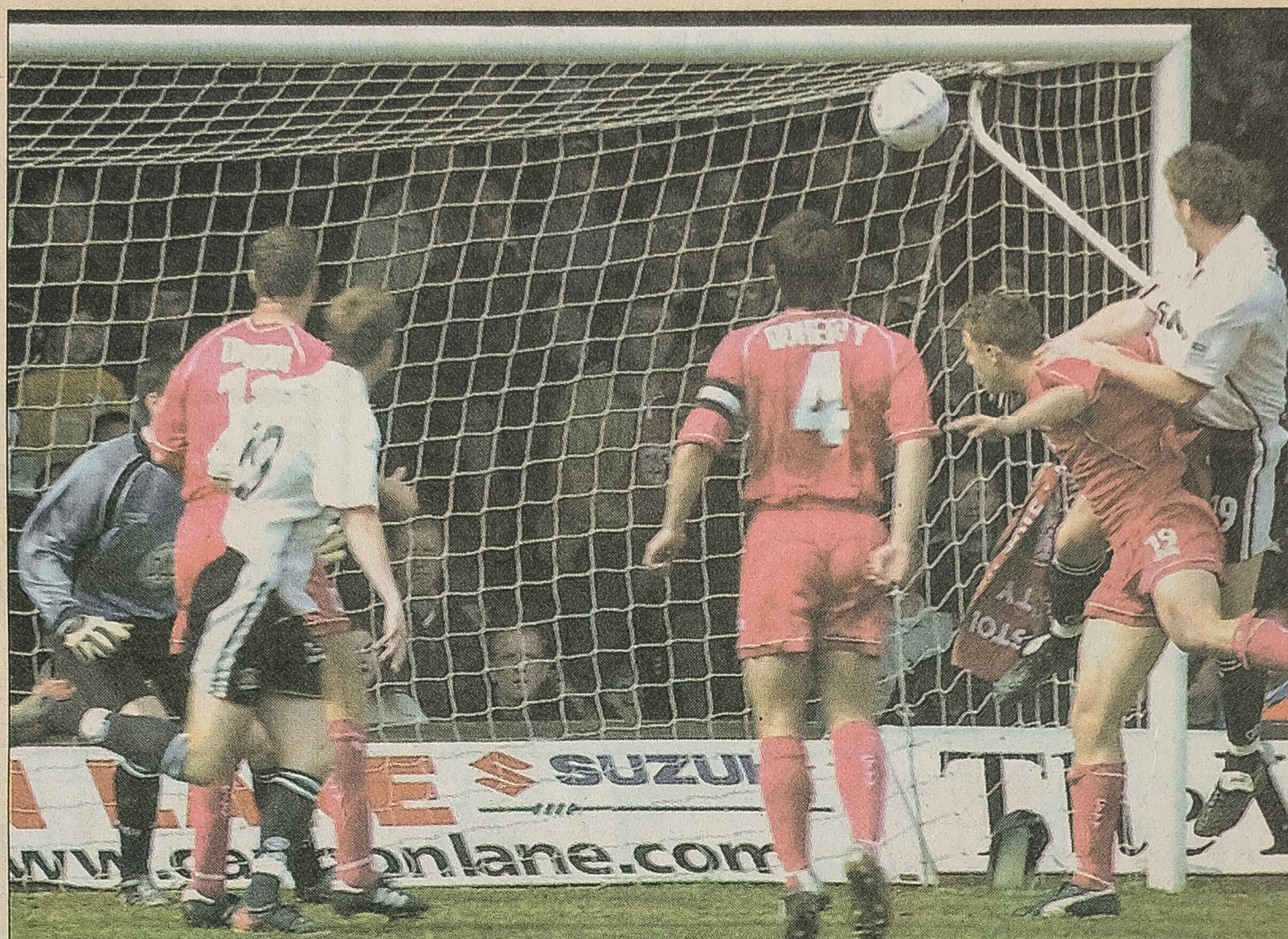
He made no mistake heading in from close range for his first goal in five games.

With the play-off pressure now behind them, the Hatters seemed more relaxed. They showed more creativity than they had in recent weeks, Spring in particular returning to his early-season form.

Not to underestimate Bristol City, ex-Hatter Danny Wilson's side have been top-five all season and their slick passing moves showed why they are potential promotion material.

Rookie Beckwith got his first taste of the action in the sixth minute when a quick turn on the ball in the box by striker Christian Roberts required the goalkeeper to dive to his near post to turn away the shot.

What had started as an attractive, passing game suddenly turned nasty in the closing stages of the



first half.

Luton's aggressive manner started to rub Bristol City up the wrong way and when Griffiths' late challenge on Peacock left the striker writhing in agony it sparked a brawl that Mr Salisbury found difficult to bring under control.

When the dust settled Griffiths marked his return to the first team with a yellow card along with skipper Kevin Nicholls, whose lunge on Tony Butler brought the half to an end.

In the first minute of the second half Beckwith produced his first significant moment with a save that he will savour for years to come. The Robins left back Matt Hill was 30 yards from goal when he let rip with a sweetly struck volley but Beckwith acrobatically tipped over the bar at full stretch.

But he was powerless to prevent the equaliser on 64 minutes when Peter Holmes tried to hitch a piggy back off Aaron Brown in the penalty area. The referee had no option but to point to the spot and veteran Brian Tinnion put it away to Beckwith's right. The young goalkeeper guessed right and came agonisingly close to marking his debut with a penalty save.

Beckwith could also be absolved of blame for City's farcical second goal ten minutes later.

A route one ball from the Robins defence was hoofed for Peacock to chase. Neilson appeared to have it covered but with the ex-Manchester City striker breathing down his neck, Neilson pulled out of heading the ball back to the keeper.

Peacock muscled Neilson off the ball and with the youngster stranded, the striker headed over him from the front edge of the area.

The Luton players protested



■ Opposite ends of the scale: Experienced Steve Howards heads Luton in front (top) and Robert Beckwith shows no nerves after making a shock debut when Mark Ovendale was injured as he warmed up before the start

about Peacock's manhandling of Neilson but the experienced defender should have cleared his lines.

In recent weeks Luton have folded in similar circumstances but this time they took the initiative to get back into the game.

An Emerson Boyce dribble down the right ended with a cross to the predatory Howard in his favourite stomping ground at the back post. He rose above his marker to head

in his 19th goal of the season with just seven minutes left.

History almost repeated itself when Peter Beadle, who had scored a last minute goal at Ashton Gate in December, came on and missed a great chance with just two minutes to go.

Kinnear was satisfied with the point, commenting: "It was a good, entertaining game. We got our courage and commitment back. We will be looking to finish the season



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town (4-4-2): Beckwith; Boyce, Neilson, Willmott, Davies; Holmes (Foley 68m), Spring, Nicholls, Hughes (Kimble 87); Howard, Griffiths
Subs not used: Bayliss, Judge, Brill

Referee: Graham Salisbury (Lancashire)

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: Howard (1, 83)
Bristol City: Tinnion (pen, 64), Peacock (74)

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 3
Bristol City: 5

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 1
Bristol City: 7

CORNERS

Luton: 3
Bristol City: 10

OFFSIDE

Luton: 4
Bristol City: 1

BOOKINGS

Luton: Spring (32), Willmott (35), Griffiths (45), Nicholls (45)
Bristol City:

ATTENDANCE: 6,381

HATTERS STAR MAN: STEVE HOWARD

Back to fine form up front

Division Two results

Brentford	1	QPR	2
Cardiff	0	Colchester	3
Crewe	0	Swindon	1
Huddersfield	0	Wigan	0
LUTON	2	Bristol City	2
Mansfield	0	Barnsley	1
Notts County	0	Tranmere	1
Oldham	4	Chesterfield	0
Peterborough	1	Blackpool	0
Plymouth	3	Port Vale	0
Wycombe	1	Cheltenham	1

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	43	27	12	4	64	24	93
Crewe	43	24	9	10	73	38	81
Cardiff	43	23	10	10	67	40	79
Oldham	43	21	15	7	62	34	78
Bristol City	43	22	11	10	75	46	77
QPR	43	22	10	11	66	45	76
Tranmere	43	20	11	12	56	54	71
Plymouth	43	16	13	14	60	48	61
Luton	43	16	13	14	60	59	61
Colchester	43	14	15	14	52	50	57
Blackpool	43	15	11	17	52	57	56
Swindon	43	14	12	17	55	58	54
Peterborough	43	13	14	16	48	52	53
Notts County	43	12	16	15	61	67	52
Stockport	43	14	9	20	60	65	51
Wycombe	43	13	11	19	58	59	54
Brentford	43	13	11	19	44	54	50
Barnsley	43	12	13	18	49	61	49
Port Vale	43	13	10	20	48	66	49
Chesterfield	43	13	7	23	40	70	46
Cheltenham	43	9	17	17	49	66	44
Huddersfield	43	11	11	21	36	53	44
Mansfield	43	11	7	25	60	90	44
Northampton	43	10	8	25	37	71	38