



Rookie stopper stakes claim for next season

02/03

IT was a low-key celebration at Luton's last home game of the season as only a super display by teenage goalkeeper Robert Beckwith ensured they left the party with a point.

He made a string of outstanding saves to suggest that he could save manager Joe Kinnear splashing out in the transfer market in the summer.

Steve Howard's sixth goal in three games gave Hatters the lead but justice was done when County's skipper Dave Challinor equalised eight minutes from the end.

Luton followed up their thumping of Colchester United 5-0 on Bank Holiday Monday by naming an unchanged side.

The biggest win of the season renewed optimism that the season would end with a flourish and a top ten place in Division Two.

Carlton Palmer's County have staved off the prospect of two straight relegation with four wins in a row in April that moved them out of the bottom four.

On the bench for Hatters was Ahmet Brkovic, who has been out injured for a month.

Neither side had anything to play for except pride, and it was County who came out looking the hungrier.

As early as the fourth minute County signalled their intent to go all out for revenge for a 3-2 defeat at Edgeley Park in October.

Winger Ali Gibb beat Sol Davies for pace on the right hand side and whipped in a cross for Aaron Lescott, who diverted it goalwards but Beckwith's outstretched hand palmed it to safety.

In the early stages Luton looked blunt in attack, offering few ideas and giving the crowd little to enthuse over.

The only positive action from a dour Hatters first half came on eight minutes from a Peter Holmes dribble on the left ended with Steve Howard having the chance of a trademark back-post header. This time he was off target as his effort flew over the bar.

At the other end, Luton had their rookie goalkeeper to thank for keeping the score blank.

A Jim Goodwin free kick from the edge of the box beat the seven-man Luton wall but not Beckwith, whose diving save prevented a County goal.

Just one minute later another Goodwin free kick from a similar position was drilled low and ricocheted off striker Jon Daly's boot. But Beckwith's reflexes yet again were equal to the task.

Stockport started the second half pretty much as they ended the first - in complete control.

Despite their wealth of possession, County could not unlock a stubborn Town defence, which was



well marshalled by Alan Neilson.

And on 60 minutes, just as Luton were looking about to fold under the immense pressure, Howard popped up for his sixth goal in three matches.

Brkovic, on for Hughes to add some much-needed zest in attack, got to the bye-line and his pinpoint cross sailed over Ola Tidman for Howard to nod into an empty net.

It was harsh on Stockport who had been by far the better of the two teams until that point.

The goal gave Luton a shove in the right direction and they surged forward to get the killer goal, which they should have had on 70 minutes.

From a short corner, Brkovic burst into the box and his telling pass set up Carl Griffiths from five yards out. Somehow he put his shot wide.

Luton rued that miss as on 82 minutes County got their deserved leveller.

After playing pretty football, County's equaliser was much more basic. A corner was flicked on at the near post by substitute Rickie Lambert for captain Dave Challinor to head in unmarked at



■ Big influence: Ahmet Brkovic made his presence felt as a sub, while Carl Griffiths (above) missed a second-half sitter

the far post.

Kinnear was happy with the point. "It was a very competitive game. We needed that second goal to kill them off.

"I thought we defended a bit too deep."

As his players came back on to the pitch to thank the fans for their support this season, Kinnear commented: "I would have loved to have done better for them and got

us into the play-offs.

"Their support has been brilliant and I am glad we stuffed Watford for them."

Firebrand County boss Palmer was furious with the referee for "not protecting my players from Luton's strongarm tactics".

Palmer insisted that two Luton players should have been sent off but Kinnear retorted with: "That's Carlton for you, he doesn't know



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town (4-4-2): Beckwith; Boyce, Willmott (Bayliss 46m), Neilson, Davies; Holmes, Nicholls, Spring, Hughes (Brkovic 57); Howard, Griffiths (Skelton 81)
Subs not used: Brill, Kimble

Referee: Mike Thorpe (Suffolk)

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: Howard (60)

Stockport: Challinor (82)

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 2

Stockport: 8

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 5

Stockport: 4

CORNERS

Luton: 3

Stockport: 5

OFFSIDE

Luton: 8

Stockport: 3

BOOKINGS

Luton: Bayliss (84)

Stockport: 0

ATTENDANCE: 6,010

HATTERS STAR MAN: ROBERT BECKWITH

Could save Joe Kinnear thousands in the transfer market

Division Two results

Barnsley	1	Brentford	0
Cardiff	0	Wigan	0
Cheltenham	3	Blackpool	0
Chesterfield	2	Bristol City	0
LUTON	1	Stockport	1
Northampton	2	Plymouth	2
Oldham	4	Swindon	0
Peterborough	1	Notts County	0
Port Vale	5	Huddersfield	1
QPR	0	Crewe	0
Tranmere	2	Mansfield	0
Wycombe	0	Colchester	0

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	45	28	13	4	67	25	97
Crewe	45	25	10	10	75	39	85
Oldham	45	22	15	8	67	37	81
Bristol City	45	23	11	11	77	48	80
Cardiff	45	23	11	11	67	42	80
QPR	45	23	11	11	68	45	80
Tranmere	44	21	11	12	60	54	74
Luton	45	17	14	14	66	60	65
Plymouth	45	16	14	15	62	52	62
Colchester	45	14	16	15	52	55	58
Peterborough	45	14	15	16	50	53	57
Swindon	45	15	12	18	57	62	57
Blackpool	45	15	12	18	55	63	57
Stockport	45	15	10	20	63	67	55
Brentford	45	14	11	20	46	55	53
Port Vale	45	14	11	20	54	68	53
Wycombe	45	13	13	19	59	65	52
Notts County	45	12	16	17	61	70	52
Barnsley	45	13	13	19	51	63	52
Chesterfield	45	14	7	24	42	72	49
Cheltenham	45	10	18	17	53	67	48
Huddersfield	45	11	11	23	38	60	44
Mansfield	44	11	8	25	63	93	41
Northampton	45	10	9	26	39	77	39