



# Captain's star turn gives Hatters victory <sup>03/04</sup>

**Luton Town:** Beckwith, Foley, Coyne, Bayliss, Neilson (Davis 85), Boyce, Spring, Hughes, Pitt (Brkovic 90), Howard, McSheffrey (Crowe 75).  
**Subs:** Hillier, Brill.

**Referee:** Brian Curson, Leics

**GOALSCORERS:**  
**Luton:** Howard 5, 22, McSheffrey 13  
**Hartlepool:** Clarke 38, Robinson 71

**SHOTS ON TARGET**  
**Luton:** 7  
**Hartlepool:** 3

**SHOTS OFF TARGET**  
**Luton:** 11  
**Hartlepool:** 4

**CORNERS**  
**Luton:** 7  
**Hartlepool:** 4

**OFFSIDE**  
**Luton:** 2  
**Hartlepool:** 5

**BOOKINGS**  
**Luton:** Bayliss 38, McSheffrey 58  
**Hartlepool:** Clarke 34

**ATTENDANCE:** 5,515

**HATTERS STAR MAN:**  
Steve Howard - Captain fantastic!

**Luton Town 3  
Hartlepool 2**

**CAPTAIN Fantastic Steve Howard** showed why Luton really can't afford to be without him.

The much sought-after striker grabbed a brace and Gary McSheffrey scored his first goal in Luton colours as the Hatters just about held on to victory.

A brilliant first-half display was slightly tarnished as Luton almost threw away three points when Hartlepool came back the stronger during the second 45 minutes.

The result was sweet revenge for Luton boss Mike Newell as he beat his former employers and saw a much better performance from his Hatters side after the past two defeats to Grimsby and Brighton.

Captain Kevin Nicholls was out with a niggling knee injury that he had been carrying since pre-season. In came Emmerson Boyce down the right-hand side, but who would be stand-in skipper?

Step forward Howard with a point to prove. After last week's sale of Tony Thorpe, many believed Howard would be the next out of Kenilworth Road.

Sheffield Wednesday put in a £100,000 bid mid week, but the derisory offer was quickly turned down. This left fans' favourite Howard to lead his side out and play his part in 22 minutes of spell-binding football from the Hatters.

Three goals in quick succession from a side that had looked so goal-shy over the Bank Holiday weekend followed, the first coming after just five minutes.

A long ball into the box found the nimble McSheffrey. The youngster's great control and cheeky lob over his marker gave him the chance to volley on his left peg. The shot cannoned off a 'Pool defender - and who should be lurking on the penalty spot but the man of the moment, Howard.

His sidefoot blast flew into an empty net and the big striker ran straight to the crowd to celebrate.

Luton's two on-loan stars then combined



■ Howard's way: Captain led the way



■ Howard gets stuck in again

for the second on 13 minutes. Courtney Pitt - Luton's most creative outlet all game - was caught napping in his own half and was promptly brushed off the ball by 'Pool striker Paul Robinson.

But Pitt refused to take such an insult and tackled the ball straight back off Robinson. His vision allowed him to play a superb 40-yard ball for McSheffrey to chase and chest through the middle of two defenders before coolly lobbing the on-rushing keeper.

McSheffrey and Howard linked up well

throughout the game and it was their partnership that produced Luton's third and Howard's second.

Howard was pushed over 35 yards from goal and from McSheffrey's resulting, in-swinging free kick, Howard put away a trade mark header. The makeshift captain was duly mobbed and his name was chanted all round the ground.

Hat-trick-hunting Howard almost put Luton ahead three minutes later when another of his headers smashed against the crossbar.

After building up such a convincing lead, the hard part was always going to be hanging on to it.

Hartlepool clawed a goal back just before half time, Gavin Strachen's free kick from the edge of the box ricocheted off the wall and fell to Darrel Clarke in the six-yard box, who volleyed over his shoulder and past Rob Beckwith.

Hartlepool came out the livelier side second half and Luton had Beckwith to thank for keeping them at bay when he saved Richie Humphreys' point-blank shot early on. He could not be blamed for 'Pool's life line on 71 minutes when a bizarre refereeing decision delivered their second goal.

Sub Steve Istead burst into the box and seemed to collide with Alan Neilson as they stumbled over each other. But referee Brian Curson must have seen something that I couldn't from the press box as he pointed to the spot despite Luton protests. Humphreys got the better of Beckwith this time, sending the spot kick in to the roof of the net.

From then on it was backs to the wall stuff from Luton, but they came away with all three points.

## Division Two results

Barnsley	1	Notts County	1
Bristol City	1	Grimsby	0
Luton	3	Hartlepool	2
Oldham	3	Rushden	2
Peterborough	1	Stockport	2
Plymouth	3	Brighton	3
Port Vale	1	Brentford	0
QPR	3	Chesterfield	0
Swindon	2	Blackpool	2
Tranmere	1	Colchester	1
Wrexham	0	Bournemouth	1

## How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Port Vale	5	4	0	1	9	7	12
Barnsley	5	3	2	0	7	3	11
QPR	5	3	1	1	13	5	10
Brighton	5	3	1	1	10	6	10
Wrexham	5	3	1	1	5	3	10
<b>Luton</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
Bristol City	5	2	2	1	9	4	8
Swindon	5	2	2	1	11	7	8
Hartlepool	5	2	2	1	9	7	8
Grimsby	5	2	1	2	8	7	7
Sheffield Wed	4	2	1	1	8	7	7
Rushden	5	2	1	2	10	11	7
Blackpool	5	2	1	2	8	13	7
Tranmere	5	1	3	1	7	5	6
Plymouth	5	1	3	1	10	9	6
Peterborough	5	2	0	3	8	7	6
Bournemouth	5	1	2	2	6	7	5
Wycombe	4	1	1	2	7	9	4
Colchester	5	1	1	3	6	8	4
Oldham	5	1	1	3	9	12	4
Chesterfield	5	0	4	1	5	8	4
Stockport	5	1	1	3	5	8	4
Brentford	5	1	0	4	3	10	3
Notts County	5	0	1	4	1	12	1



■ Get a lob of that: McSheffrey's goal finishes off a beautiful Hatters move