



Picture: Joanna Cross

HOWIE THE HERO: Steve Howard is mobbed by his team-mates as the Kenilworth End crowd celebrate Luton's last-minute winner.

Howard's big finish

HATTERS 3 SHEFF WEDS 2

STEVE Howard notched goals number 15 and 16 for the season as Luton produced a storming second-half comeback against struggling Sheffield Wednesday.

Hatters, somewhat unjustly, found themselves 2-0 down at half-time to goals from Jon Shaw and Terry Cooke.

But Howard's brace and teenager Stephen O'Leary's first senior goal ensured Luton ended their final home league game of the season on a high.

Howard, a threat to the Owls all afternoon, made it six goals in his last seven games, taking him ahead of Adrian Forbes as the club's top goalscorer.

And Town boss Mike Newell was first to praise his big forward. He said: "He's a handful and he will always cause teams problems because of his pure physical presence.

"He gives you other things as well as just goals although he's scored 16 now himself, which when you consider he was missing for eight weeks with a hernia injury, is a great return."

Even Wednesday boss Chris Turner admitted he would have loved to have had the 27-year-old striker playing for him rather than against him.

Turner, who expressed an interest in

Steve brace sparks win

taking Howard to Hillsborough last summer, added: "He caused us a problem in the air - that's his strength and we couldn't deal with him."

Before the game, Newell spoke of his fear of out-of-contract players leaving in the summer. But the manager will at least take comfort in Howard having another year left on his current deal.

On his other players, Newell said: "We'll have to wait and see, but I do believe it's too late for some of our players and we're going to end up losing them for nothing.

"The likes of Boycie and others have come up through the ranks and the club should be making some sort of profit on them as they did with Matthew Taylor, Matthew Upson and Gary Doherty.

"It's the only way clubs like Luton and lower league clubs can survive."

Regardless of any possible summer departures, Hatters were determined to end their home league campaign with a positive display.

Adrian Forbes was called back into the Town's starting 11 at the expense of Enoch Showunmi. Fit again Emmerson Boyce, Steve Robinson and Alan Neilson returned in place of Curtis Davies, Michael Leary and Keith Keane.

Teenager Dean Brill was preferred in goal to Morten Hyldgaard.

Howard had the first of his many attempts on goal in the 10th minute when Kevin Foley's cross rebounded to the striker, but he fired his left-foot shot against the post from eight yards.

Forbes then saw his follow-up effort headed off the line by Derek Geary.

Wednesday went ahead when ex-Hatter Paul McLaren chipped in for Shaw to steal behind Boyce and head home from 10 yards in the 23rd minute.

The Owls doubled their advantage 10 minutes later when Chris Brunt's hopeful long ball saw a calamitous mix-up between Sol Davis and Brill, allowing Cooke to tap into the empty net.

Hatters rallied after the break and O'Leary squared for Howard to sidefoot home on the volley from six yards in the 54th minute.

Howard then returned the favour in the 78th minute, heading back Foley's deep cross for O'Leary to scuff his shot into the corner from eight yards.

Brilliance from Showunmi on the right then set up Howard to slide in the last-minute winner from close range and spark delight on the terraces.

STAR HATTER: Kevin Foley. Excellent attacking display on the right wing.

MIKE NEWELL'S VERDICT



"I FELT even at half-time that we had played some decent stuff.

"They looked dangerous up to the break because we let them and we conceded two sloppy goals, which has been the story of our season.

"We just felt that if we continued as we had in the first-half then we would

get chances and that if we put them on the rack they might just cave in.

"The lads showed what they've shown all season and that's a desire to win and to keep going.

"With nothing left to play for this season they could easily have thrown the towel in at half-time, but they didn't do that."