

Howie strikes four a record

HATTERS 1 TORQUAY 0

KENILWORTH ROAD hosted a visit from Sky's saucy Torquay-supporting Soccer AM presenter Helen Chamberlain and Bedford's FHM High Street Honey hopeful Samantha Lucas on Saturday.

But there was only ever going to be one weekend winner when it came to being good up front.

Hatters hit-man Steve Howard lived up to the pre-match hype to bag his ninth goal in eight games and send Luton club records – and Torquay – spinning.

Chamberlain and Lucas may boast impressive figures, but so does Howard – purely on a statistical goalscoring basis, of course!

His 36th minute header means he has scored in each of the last eight games that he has started for the Hatters, setting a new club record of sorts.

And the 1-0 win over the Gulls took Luton top of the table with four wins out of four and marked the best-ever start to a season by any Hatters side in the club's long history. Howard told The News-Gazette: "I'm delighted with that and it was really nice to get that goal."

"For the first 20 minutes or so I thought it might end up being one of those days because we had plenty of the ball but they were defending well."

"But it was a great ball in from Keith (Keane) and I managed to put it in there."

"I'm just want to keep scoring because that's what I'm here for. The lads are getting the ball into the box whenever we can and it's suiting me just fine."

Howard's successive goal feat beats the seven-game limit previously shared between Andy Rennie (1928-29), Jack Ball (1934-35), Joe Payne (1936-37) and Jessie Pye (1952-53).

However, historians are questioning the validity of the claim as although the goals came in successive games for

Steve's greight show secures best-ever start

Howard they weren't successive Luton games as the forward missed the final game of last term at Chesterfield.

Howie said: "At the end of the day records don't really concern me. As long as I keep on scoring and the team keeps on winning that'll do for me."

Howard now has 70 goals from 143 Luton appearances, leaving him joint sixth in the club's post-war scorers list.

Town boss Mike Newell said of his leading goalscorer: "In any league in the world that is a fantastic scoring rate and it's good for us to have that sort of threat up-front."

"As for whether it's a club record or not we've told him the only way to be sure is to simply keep on scoring!"

Hatters welcomed Keane and Ahmet Brkovic for their first starts of the season against Torquay on Saturday.

And after two Chris Coyne headers, Brkovic had the best chance to open the scoring in the 16th minute after a flowing move involving Rowan Vine, Steve Robinson, Howard and Kevin Nicholls, but he shot at the keeper from 12 yards.

The breakthrough came when Keane found space on the right and crossed for Howard to beat Steve Woods and head into the bottom corner from 15 yards.

Hatters largely controlled possession without creating any clear openings after the break. Instead the Gulls came perilously close to a leveller when substitute Adebayo Akinfenwa raced clear at the death but rolled the ball just wide.



GOAL: Howard beats Gulls skipper Steve Woods to nod the winner.

MIKE NEWELL'S VERDICT



"IT was another shaky end to the game, but that seems to par for the course at the moment. We need to learn how to put teams out of reach before the end of the game."

"We were in front, but it's dangerous because it leads you into a false sense of security and there's still plenty for us to work on."

"Torquay are no mugs and you don't get pro-

moted without knowing how to pick up points away from home."

"We played some good football, but you have to have something at the end of all that and we didn't really test their keeper until about 25 or 30 minutes into the game."

"At 1-0 they're still in it and it was never that comfortable. We may be top but nobody's getting carried away."

STAR HATTER



KEVIN NICHOLLS: The Hatters skipper led by example in the middle of the park. Nicholls played his usual tough-tackling role, but was also effective with his passing.

When Luton's nerves began to jangle towards the end, Nicholls was the calming influence.

His superb covering tackle for full-back Keith Keane five minutes from time underlined his commitment to the cause.

Leroy adds to Howie praise

TORQUAY boss Leroy Rosenior joined the ever-expanding Steve Howard appreciation society after seeing his Gulls side narrowly lose to Luton.

Former West Ham forward Rosenior was pleased with his side's display. But he highlighted the finishing of Howard as the difference between the

teams. Rosenior said: "We defended well in the first-half, but the quality of Howard was too much for us in the end."

"It was a great goal and we're not used to that sort of quality. In a lower division we might have got away with that, but that's the difference this year – the strikers we come up against

are going to put away a higher percentage of their chances."

"Howard only really had a couple of headers, but he put the most difficult one away."

"We've played Bristol City, Hull, Sheffield Wednesday and Luton so far and they've probably got the best strikers in the league between them."