

One in the eye for the Seagulls

04/05

**Luton Town 1
Torquay 0**

SUPER Steve Howard rewrote the history books with his eighth goal in eight games as Luton Town went top of the table in less than convincing fashion.

Despite having the lion's share of the game, Hatters held on nervously in the final minutes against a side that should have been well beaten.

This fourth win in four games, coupled with Colchester's defeat, means Hatters are now top of the pile but manager Mike Newell isn't getting carried away and admitted his side still haven't discovered the knack of killing off games.

"Holding on seems to be par for the course at the minute. Again we're not happy - we need to start putting games out of reach," said Newell.

"Sometimes you have to grind out results, but I'm delighted to be top - although it is still early in the season. But it's clear we're not playing our best yet and we'll be working on getting better.

"Going ahead can be dangerous. It lulls you into a false sense of security. Everybody in the country probably had this one down as a home win but football's not like that. Torquay are a good footballing side."

Howard hasn't scored in eight consecutive Luton matches as he missed the final day defeat to Chesterfield through suspension. But Newell insists the striker should still be proud.

"Eight goals in eight games is very impressive. I'm not sure if he's broken a Luton record but that's for the historians to argue about. I just hope he carries on."

Newly-promoted Torquay came to Kenilworth Road feeling the pressure of League One football. They had just one point from their opening three games and injuries and suspensions that forced striker Tony Bedau to play at right back. Against a near full strength, in-form Luton, it should have been lambs - or even Seagulls - to the slaughter.

Hatters' opening 45-minute display backed up that view but a couple of Chris Coyne headers were all Luton had to show in the early action.

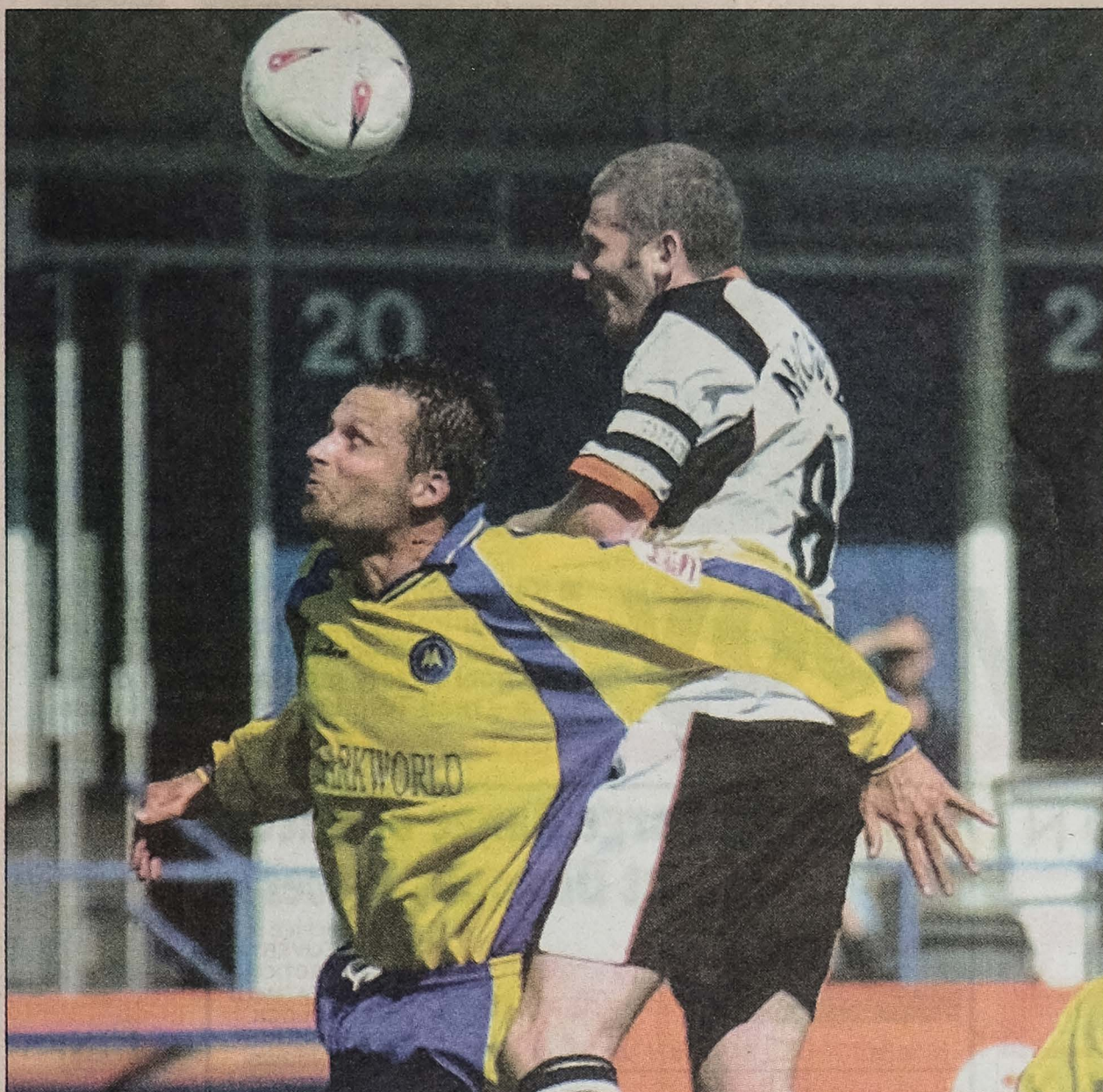
Ahmet Brkovic, in for the injured Stephen O'Leary, should have opened the scoring on 15 minutes but tried to pass his shot into the net from just inside the area.

Despite virtually laying siege to the Torquay goal, Luton were having trouble converting possession into chances - until Howard had his way on 36 minutes.

When a host of suitors hovered around Howard during the summer, Newell refused to contemplate selling his star asset - often simply saying 'who do you replace Steve Howard with'?

Time and time again, the big hitman has delivered the goods for Luton Town - and he put Hatters one up but with a trademark header.

Keith Keane started his first game of the season for the sidelined Kevin Foley and when the young right back swung his cross into the box there was only going to be one outcome as Howard glanced past a full-stretched Arjan van Huesden in the Seagulls' goal.



■ Heads we win: Kevin Nicholls launches himself into a header

Newell's men looked to be strolling to an easy three points. But they almost pressed the self-destruct button yet again.

After 50 minutes Torquay finally had an attempt at Marlon Beresford's net. Former Arsenal trainee Jo Kuffour, who looked lively when given time on the ball, caught an eye of goal on the edge of the box.

It took a deflection of a Luton player to take the sting out of the shot and send it for the Seagulls' first corner of the game.

Torquay looked as toothless in attack as they did in the first half, and Hatters didn't look much better.

Luton were clearly superior to the visitors, passing the ball from wing to wing and having the bulk of the play, the Seagulls were defending so deeply Hatters had no choice but to aim balls into the box.

It didn't worry Torquay but it was worrying some of the home fans who were clearly anxious of a late equaliser against the run of play that would rob Hatters of victory.

Those fears were heightened on 77 minutes when winger Matthew Hill beat Luton's offside trap and had a one-on-one with Beresford. But Hill's shot wasn't as quick as his run and Hatters breathed a sigh of relief as his effort dribbled wide. Newell quickly shook things up by bringing on Enoch Showunmi.

But it was Torquay's second half substitute Adebayo Akinfenwa who almost had the game's biggest impact.

As the seconds counted down, Seagulls' left back Brian McGlinchy hit a hopeful ball forward. The powerfully-built Akinfenwa muscled Curtis Davies, who otherwise impressed at centre half, off the ball and ran through on goal. But his outside of the boot flick went wide and sent Torquay back to the coast empty-handed.



■ He's done it again: Steve Howard celebrates his eight goal in successive games



■ That dizzy feeling: Hatters boss Mike Newell on being top of the table



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town: Beresford; Keane, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic, Robinson, Nicholls, Underwood; Vine (Showunmi 80m), Howard. Subs not used: Seremet, Barnett, Leary, Blinkhorn

Referee: Mark Fletcher (Worcester)

GOALSCORERS:
Luton: Howard (36)
Torquay: -

SHOTS ON TARGET
Luton: 8
Torquay: 1

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Luton: 8
Torquay: 3

CORNERS
Luton: 8
Torquay: 3

OFFSIDE
Luton: 4
Torquay: 4

BOOKINGS
Luton: Davis (86)
Torquay: Bedeau (5), Hockley (85)

ATTENDANCE: 6,664

HATTERS STAR MAN:
STEVE HOWARD

Who else would confirm Luton's best-ever start to a season