

Howard sparks Luton revival

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By Peter Keeling

BLACKPOOL

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LUTON TOWN

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STEVE Howard, signed from Northampton for less than a week's wage for most Premiership players, must rank as the bargain buy of the last three years in English football, scoring again at Bloomfield Road in a record-breaking start to the new season.

After Howard's equaliser, Croatian midfielder Ahmet Brkovic produced the winner and then a clinching goal in this top-versus-bottom First Division game which leaves Luton with the only 100 per cent record in the revamped Football League and Durham-born Howard, a £50,000 buy in March 2001, with the record of having scored in each of his last nine games.

Mike Newell's team took some time to get into their stride and were shocked as Blackpool took a fourth-minute lead when Scott Taylor prod-

ded home a Paul Edwards free-kick. But then Luton started to turn the screw, and Newell said afterwards: "We did not get the ball down and play as we can in the first half; but at half-time we asked them to show us what they could do, and the players responded magnificently.

"Blackpool had looked nervous even with the 1-0 lead, and although we were handicapped by the interpretation of the offside rule, that seems to change every week, we gradually took over the game. Now we are getting to the stage where people are, perhaps, beginning to realise our good start is no fluke."

Newell had spent five years playing in the same Blackburn team as Colin Hendry, the Blackpool manager; but his side made sure there was no old pals' act in the script of the game, every man playing his part and goalkeeper Marlon Beresford making an important save at the feet of Taylor just before half-time.

Luton attacked from the start of the second half, with Rowan Vine almost cashing in on hesitant defending in the first minute. Lee Jones then made a magnificent save from Steve Robinson and from Paul Underwood's follow-up header before Howard scrambled the 58th-minute equaliser.

A minute later Luton were ahead, with Brkovic losing his markers. Blackpool's marking was certainly non-existent and Howard almost scored two more before Brkovic scored the third in injury time with a simple chip.

"I was disgusted," said an angry Hendry. "We could not ask for a better start. Our back four just did not do the basic things."

Blackpool (4-4-2): Jones; Richardson (Parker 84), Clare, Grayson (Mike Flynn 60), R Edwards; Bullock, McGregor, Michael Flynn, P Edwards; Taylor, Murphy. **Subs:** Ilic (g), Evans, Coid. **Goal:** Taylor (4). **Booked:** Bullock.

Luton (4-4-2): Beresford; Keane, Davies, Coyne, Davis; Brkovic, Robinson, Nicholls, Underwood; Howard, Vine. **Subs:** Ceremet (g), Leary, Showunmi, Foley, Mansell. **Goals:** Howard (58), Brkovic (59, 90). **Booked:** Brkovic, Howard, Underwood.

Referee: A Kaye (West Yorkshire).