

Pool are no match for an awesome Hatters side

04/05

HATTERS got the weekend started in some style as goals from Steve Howard, Ahmet Brkovic and late sub Gary McSheffrey helped them to their sixth successive home win.

It was sweet revenge for manager Mike Newell who was unceremoniously dumped by Pool after getting them promoted two seasons ago.

It was a bleak period for the Hatters boss who felt boardroom interference hampered his first managerial job, and Newell allowed himself a cheeky dig at the Pool board in his programme notes.

Although he insisted it was just another three points for his unbeaten Hatters, Newell must have allowed himself a vengeful smile as Luton brushed his former club aside in the second half with some superb football that must confirm Town are championship material.

"We weren't happy with our first half display - at times we had to ride our luck. Full credit to Hartlepool who played the better football," admitted Newell.

"But when we came out for the second half we were great.

"We were playing and competing better than them all over the park.

"If we play every game the way we did in the second, we're onto a winner. The players gave everything in front of the Friday night crowd and they are still full of confidence."

The game was moved due to the England v Wales international - which could explain Pool's lack of away support. But those who did make the long journey from the north east were rewarded as Pool had the better of the early chances.

Hatters were attacking in such numbers that they were always vulnerable on the break and Pool had two great chances to go ahead in the first half hour.

Striker Joel Porter spooned his shot over from six yards and Eifion Williams volleyed wide when Luton keeper Dino Seremet lay on the ground after fumbling a cross.

The Friday night crowd's fears were soothed however by Howard on 36 minutes.

Recalled after missing last week's draw with Tranmere through suspension, Hartlepool old boy Howard put Luton in the lead with a trademark header.



■ High kick: Paul Underwood connects with the ball during Friday night's clash against Hartlepool

Steve Robinson picked the big striker out from a corner and despite being marked by four Pool defenders, grabbed his sixth of the season when he glanced past goalkeeper Jim Provett.

After a slightly nervy first half, Hatters turned in a vintage second. Their non-stop running from box-to-box was breathtaking to watch and the game was effectively over when Brkovic scored an easy tap in on 51 minutes.

On the overlap Sol Davis whipped in a clever cross that sat up nicely for Rowan Vine on the volley.

The 'Powerade Player of the Month' forced a terrific save from Provett but his parry fell straight at the feet of Brkovic who won't score an easier goal all season.

It would have been easy for Luton to have sat on their lead for the remainder of the game but instead they followed their boss's command to kill teams off.

Hatters were even showboating at times as the whole side stroked the ball around with ease.

But Hatters finally put Pool out of their misery with their third goal on 84 minutes. Only on the pitch for nine minutes, substitute McSheffrey opened his account for the season with a plucky solo effort.

Luton were quick on the break, and 'The Shef' led the charge. He tried a through ball to Howard who was in the clear but a Pool player stuck a leg out to halt the attack.

On-loan McSheffrey chased and hassled ball-winner Matty Robson until he had to play the ball back to defender Mark Tinkler. McSheffrey nipped in between the two before coolly slotting past Provett. It left Newell with a real headache.

"It's very hard to leave McSheffrey on the bench when we know what a good player he is.

"Ideally I'd like to bring him here permanently, but we'll have to see."



■ Gary McSheffrey spurns Steve Howard's advances - then scores himself



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town: Seremet; Keane, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic (O'Leary 87), Robinson, Nicholls, Underwood; Vine (McSheffrey 75), Howard (Showunmi 87). Subs (not used): Beckwith, Leary.

Referee: Michael Ryan (Lancashire)

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: Howard (36), Brkovic (51), McSheffrey (84)

Hartlepool:

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 6
Hartlepool: 5

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 11
Hartlepool: 9

CORNERS

Luton: 6
Hartlepool: 5

OFFSIDE

Luton: 5
Hartlepool: 3

BOOKINGS

Luton: Robinson (5), Davis (64)
Hartlepool:

ATTENDANCE: 7,865

HATTERS STAR MAN:

Curtis Davies - simply awesome in front of Hatters' biggest crowd of the season