

Wails, wails as Hatters hit five

04/05

LUTON Town helped ease the pain of Mick Harford's untimely departure by cruising to their biggest win of the season.

It was a performance that would have had the former Director of Football beaming with pride as goals from Steve Robinson, Stephen O'Leary, Steve Howard, Ahmet Brkovic and Sol Davis – with his first ever league goal on his 101st appearance for Town – gave Hatters a comfortable victory.

Only time will tell if Harford's move to Nottingham Forest will undermine Luton's promotion ambitions but manager Mike Newell was understandably upbeat.

"We will miss and we wish him all the luck in the world. He has made a massive contribution to this club and to the squad we have now got here."

Newell have every reason to be cheerful as Hatters extended their lead at the top of League One with a sizzling display.

"We played some decent football in the first half and the goals were the icing on the cake."

"This kind of result sends out a message to everyone else. We want to dish out hidings that visit here and turn this place into a fortress."

In fairness the fortress was never seriously in danger of being breached as Wrexham came to Kenilworth Road in a parlous state. They are facing eviction from their ground and possible expulsion from the league. Neither the players nor the bills have been paid and administrators have been called in.

Dragons boss Denis Smith was forced to select a mish-mash of a team, made up of YTS players and trialists alongside more established names such as Darren Ferguson, son of Sir Alex, and former Spurs striker Chris Armstrong. Newell, meanwhile, stuck with the same XI that thumped Bradford City 4-0.

It was Welsh lambs to the slaughter as early as the 12th minute.

Hatters took a deserved lead courtesy of a rare headed goal from Robinson. Kevin Foley whipped in a cross from the right hand side and rather than go for goal himself, hit-man Howard turned provider with a knock-down that gave the diminutive Irishman sufficient time and space to send a bullet header past Matt Baker.

After 100+ appearances for Swindon and and 100 in a Hatters shirt, marauding left back Davis finally knew what it was like to hit the back of the net.

It came on 16 minutes from good work by Brkovic, whose quick turn and perfectly timed lob over the Wrexham back-line, let in Davis. He took a touch to control the ball before slotting it under Baker. The jubilant Davis was mobbed by his team-mates for belatedly breaking his duck.

His manager was impressed with his contribution throughout, commenting: "We have all been on at him to score. Hopefully there will now be score to come from Sol, who has had a fine season so far."

Wrexham were no match for Luton. The only thing holding the Hatters back was the assistant referee's flag. Luton were caught offside no fewer than ten times in the first 45 minutes.

It proved a minor obstacle as Hatters went three up on 21 minutes. Rowan Vine burst into the area and did well to stay on his feet with the 6' 7" Dennis Lawrence breathing down his neck. The on-loan striker showed



■ Another nail in the coffin. Steve Howard heads home and Steve Robinson and Stephen O'Leary celebrate another goal



good awareness when he cut the ball back – teeing up O'Leary, whose sidefoot blast also opened his account for the season.

There was time to squeeze in a fourth before half time when Howard notched his eighth goal of the campaign on 43 minutes. Foley sent in another dangerous cross that had the Dragons' defenders looking nervous. Howard rose at the far post to loop a header over a despairing Baker and give Luton an uncatchable lead.

Capping another brilliant performance, Brkovic got his name on the scoresheet just after the hour mark with an easy fifth. The Howard-Foley ball-to-box partnership was again in tandem as the big forward headed across goal from the full back's cross. Baker flapped and the ball fell on to the Croatian's head and he gratefully accepted a sitter.

The result had some shine taken off in on 72 minutes when Wrexham grabbed a late consolation. Substitute Hector Sam pounced on some hesitancy in the area to scramble the ball home from close range following a corner.



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town: Royce; Foley, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic, Robinson (Leary 56mins), O'Leary, Underwood; Vine (Showunmi 80), Howard. Subs not used: Seremet, Keane, Perrett

Referee: Mike Thorpe (Suffolk)

GOALSCORERS:

Luton: Robinson (12), Davis (16), O'Leary (21), Howard (43), Brkovic (61)
Wrexham: Sam (72)

SHOTS ON TARGET

Luton: 10
Wrexham: 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Luton: 5
Wrexham: 7

CORNERS

Luton: 3
Wrexham: 6

OFFSIDE

Luton: 11
Wrexham: 6

BOOKINGS

Luton: –
Wrexham: Ugarte (76)

ATTENDANCE:

7,144

HATTERS STAR MAN:

KEVIN FOLEY
Quality crossing and resolute defending

Newell in no hurry to name a successor to Harford

AT the second time of asking Mick Harford answered former Hatters' boss Joe Kinnear's SOS on Friday evening to join his mentor at struggling Nottingham Forest.

Forest's 2-2 draw with Rotherham confirmed to the City ground board that Kinnear needed some help.

Hatters boss Mike Newell said: "I'll take my time over a replacement. If I feel the need to bring someone in I will but we are okay with what we have got."

Two names already in the frame are reserve team boss Brian Stein and Newell's former assistant at Hartlepool Kevin Sheedy.

Harford, who was at Molineux to see Forest play Wolves, said: "It is massive wrench for me to leave the club and I'll be very sad but I would like to progress in my career. I feel that Forest at this present moment is a good move for me."

"I love Luton Town but the time is right for me to go."

Harford joined the club from Birmingham City for £250,000 in December 1984 and was an instant hit with fans. The big number 9 was integral to maintaining Luton's top-flight status in the 80s and part of their greatest-ever moment – the 3-2 win over Arsenal in the Littlewoods Cup Final.

In January 1990 he was sold to Derby County for £450,000 but his stock rose even more when his own goal helped Luton to a 2-0 win over the Rams that ensured Hatters avoided relegation on the final game of the season.

With Hatters struggling at the foot of the table, Harford returned for his second spell at the club the following season – leaving Derby for £325,000. Sadly Luton's annual relegation escape act failed in the 91-92 season and Harford left for Chelsea that summer for £300,000.



Harford went on to play for his hometown club Sunderland, Coventry City and Wimbledon where he became coach under Joe Kinnear.

Harford scored 69 league goals in 168 matches for Luton Town and 223 goals in 707 appearances for his eight other teams. He was also capped for England.

Harford's third spell at Kenilworth Road was as a coach under Kinnear in 2001 and together they turned around Hatters fortunes. The previous year Luton had been relegated but under the new coaching team Hatters had their first promotion-winning campaign for 20 years.