

Shrimpers potted by slick Howard

THE Sky TV roadshow came to Roots Hall on Friday night hoping for an FA Cup scalp but what they got was yet more proof that Luton Town are flying high.

Any fears that the Hatters might struggle to overcome their lower league hosts were quashed within the first 33 minutes as a brace from Steve Howard and another from in-form Ahmet Brkovic made the Shrimpers seem like small fry to the League One leaders.

At the same stage last season Luton struggled in front of the television cameras to a 1-1 draw with non-league Thurrock. Hatters were not as camera shy this time and the gulf in class between them and Southend United was clear for all to see.

Victorious manager Mike Newell was full of praise for his side who will surely fear no-one when the draw is announced this afternoon on BBC 1.

"I am delighted about getting through. It was a professional performance," he said. "In front of the cameras we showed, especially in the first half, why we are top of our league. The second and third goals were really good footballing goals.

"We want a home tie ideally but we're just really pleased to be in the hat for the second round."

Newell singled out his defensive pairing of Chris Coyne and Curtis Davies for praise, as well as Portsmouth loan man Rowan Vine.

"All season Coyne has been playing exceptionally well and we've got a lot of faith in Curtis. The pair of them were winning first and second balls all over the field tonight. Rowan was everywhere - it would have been nice for him to have scored but we're happy with his all round play."

Eager

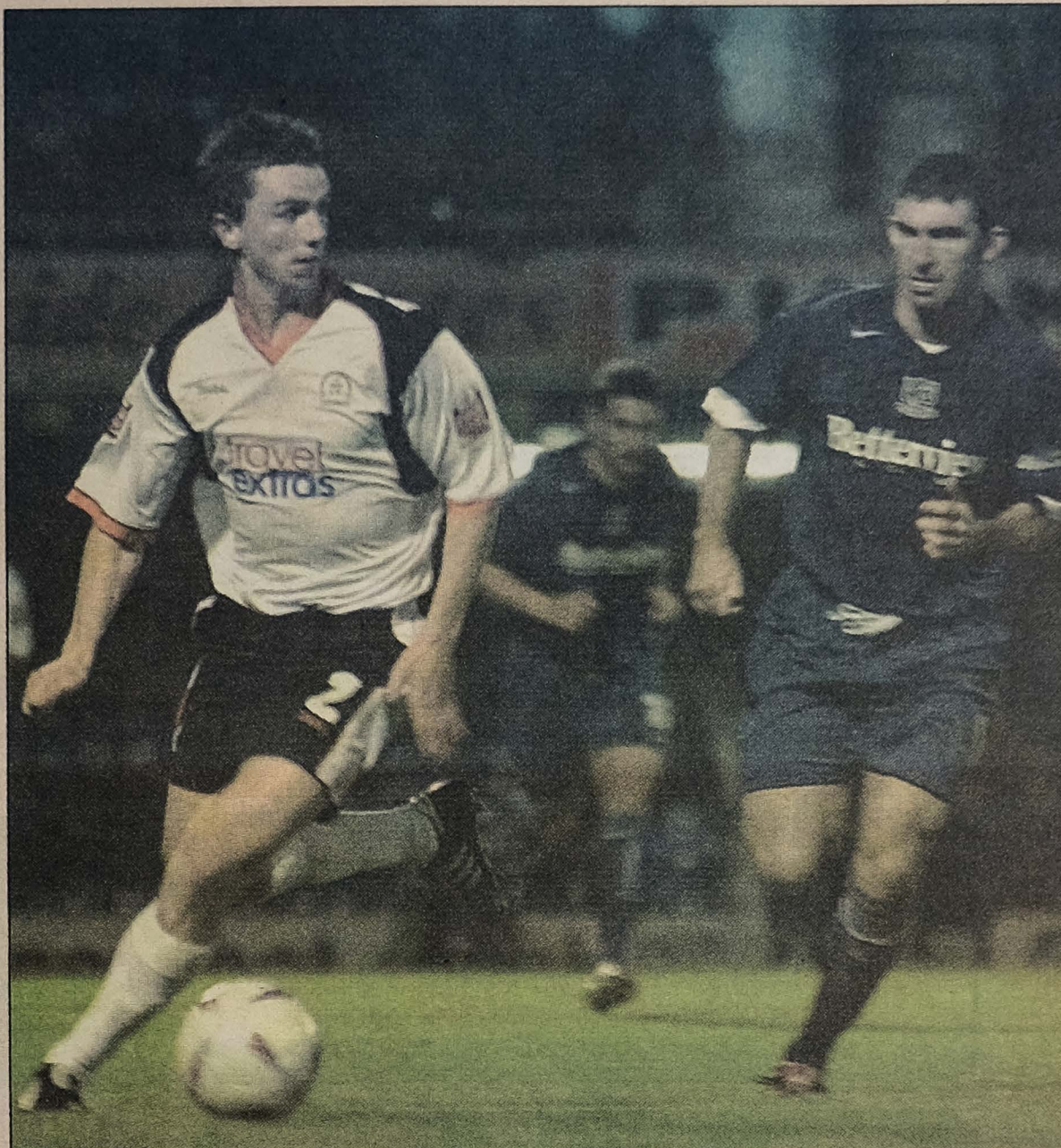
Southend were the ideal opponents to cause an upset - fifth in League Two, striker Freddie Eastwood in form with six goals in seven matches and they came into the game on the back of a 4-0 win over Oxford.

But Hatters, who lost to the Shrimpers in last season's LDV Trophy, were eager to carry their recent league form into the cup - which they did after just 12 minutes.

Vine seemed to be trapped by Southend defenders at the corner flag but tricked his way out before Steve Robinson took the ball off his toes and burst into the box.

The Irishman teed up Brkovic for a shot but the Croatian's strike was blocked. Shrimpers' keeper Bart Griemink should have come off his line to claim the looping ball but Howard punished him for his hesitancy and side-footed in from three yards.

If Howard's first was scrappy, his and Luton's second three minutes later was sheer class. The waspish Vine again broke free down the wing, holding up play before laying the ball into the path of Howard who gave Griemink no chance with a powerful blast from just inside the penalty area.



■ Kevin Foley looks to launch another Hatters attack in the impressive win at Southend and (right) Sol Davis salutes the fans after the 3-0 success

It was the big striker's tenth of the season, which put him two ahead of nearest rival Brkovic - until the 33rd minute.

After Luton's midfield stroked the ball about with ease Vine delivered a perfectly timed through ball to Brkovic. The midfielder was immediately one-on-one with Griemink who he rounded before coolly slotting home.

Shrimpers' great hope Eastwood was nowhere near as impressive as the half-time cheerleaders who made temperatures soar despite the sea wind although the ex-West Ham trainee did warm Dino Seremet's gloves with a long shot on 35 minutes.

Seremet was the only change to the side that beat Wrexham 5-1 as Simon Royce's employers, Charlton, did not want him cup-tied.

The Slovenian - making his first start since the 3-0 defeat to Hull - didn't have much to deal with in the second half, despite Southend throwing on an extra striker.

Their best chance came on 66 minutes when Coyne cleared off the line from defender Adam Barrett's header from a corner.

Although the Shrimpers had slightly more of the game in the second half, it soon became clear Sky wasn't going to capture a cup upset - and 551 Hatters fans who braved the bracing sea air went home happy.



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town: Seremet; Foley, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic, Robinson (Leary 72mins), O'Leary, Underwood; Howard, Vine (Showunmi 88). Subs (not used); Beckwith, Keane, Bayliss

Referee: Referee: Richard Beeby (Northamptonshire)

GOALSCORERS:
Southend:
Luton: Howard 12, 15, Brkovic 33

SHOTS ON TARGET
Southend: 4
Luton: 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Southend: 5
Luton: 5

CORNERS
Southend: 7
Luton: 1

04/05 (FAC)

OFFSIDE
Southend: 2
Luton: 2

BOOKINGS
Southend: -
Luton: Coyne (73), O'Leary (86)

ATTENDANCE: 6,683

HATTERS STAR MAN: ROWAN VINE

Played a part in all three goals and his persistence deserved to get him on the scoresheet

