

Owls hold Hatters

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TOWN manager Mike Newell stressed the importance of keeping in-form Sheffield Wednesday at arm's length after a pulsating New Year's Day encounter.

Hatters and sleeping giants Wednesday – now revitalised under the leadership of new boss Paul Sturrock – combined to produce a feast of attacking football that blew away any hangovers being suffered in Luton's biggest home crowd of the season and the highest gate at Kenilworth Road in nearly three years.

Exactly 9,500, Town's largest attendance since a 2-0 Division Three win over Plymouth on February 2 2002 saw Wednesday take the lead against the run of play through Kenwyne Jones after a mix-up between Marlon Beresford and Curtis Davies at the end of the first-half.

But Steve Howard levelled matters straight after the break and both sides then missed chances to take all three

points in an end-to-end battle. Newell said: "We don't want to give teams like Sheffield Wednesday a sniff or a chance of closing the gap. They are a good side who have had an upturn in fortunes since the arrival of Paul Sturrock.

"They will cause other teams problems and take points off other sides, which is what we want."

Sturrock himself praised Luton's contribution to an absorbing contest. He said: "Before the game we stressed the importance of coming away from here with something and we've done that.

"It's a difficult place to come to because Kenilworth Road is a fortress as far as Luton are concerned with the style of play they have built up here over the last two or three seasons.

"They have players who know each other and have a good side who will get promoted. Yes, we had chances to win it, but so did Luton and I think the draw was probably the fair result."

Paul Underwood returned after missing the 2-2 draw with Colchester as,

despite being at home, Luton lined up in their orange away strip to avoid a clash with Wednesday's all grey change strip.

A frenetic first-half saw Kevin Nicholls, Chris Coyne and Kevin Foley all force saves from visiting goalkeeper David Lucas while Paul Heckingbottom tested Beresford and Lee Bullen drilled a 20-yard snapshot just wide for the Owls.

The visitors took the lead when Southampton loan forward Jones poked home from 15 yards after hesitation between Beresford and Davies in dealing with a long Wednesday clearance.

Hatters levelled 30 seconds after the interval when Steve Robinson's speculative 20-yard effort bounced back off the corner of post and crossbar and Ahmet Brkovic nodded across goal for Howard to head home from close range.

Beresford saved brilliantly from Steve MacLean in the 53rd minute and Joey O'Brien volleyed wide 10 minutes later, but Nicholls also went close with a 25-yard free-kick and Rowan Vine was denied by Lucas when sent clean through at the end.

STAR HATTER

KEVIN FOLEY: The 20-year-old Republic of Ireland youth international is getting back to his best after a start to the season hampered by injury.

Foley showed the sort of attacking intent against Wednesday that so excited Luton fans last season.

But the youngster also stuck to his defensive duties against a swiftly-breaking Owls side.



MIKE NEWELL'S VERDICT

"WE gifted them a goal by letting the ball bounce, which we haven't been doing so far this season.

"Curtis knows he should have cleared the ball, but he'll learn from that mistake.

"I don't care whether that sort of thing happens to someone who is aged 19, 26 or 30 – they will be treated the same way.



"It's always disappointing when soft goals end up costing you points, but the lads got themselves back into it and got something out of the game.

"It wasn't a great day for football with the wind swirling around, but we never gave up and I'm not too disappointed by the result.

"There's a long way to go and we've got plenty of grit in the side."

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EQUALISER: Steve Howard heads home past David Lucas.