

Howard really proves worth as target man

04/05

LUTON

Howard (47)

SHEFFIELD WED

Jones (45)

By **Graham Williams**

STEVEN HOWARD preserved Luton's position at the top and showed exactly why Wednesday tried to recruit him last summer.

The Sheffield club made two unsuccessful bids to land the striker, who was plucked from Northampton for a bargain £50,000 by former boss Joe Kinnear.

How Wednesday must wish they had upped their £200,000 bid to wrestle Howard away from Luton.

The big forward's equaliser wiped out a 44th-minute opening goal by Kenwyne Jones. And the draw means Luton retain the top berth in League One — a position they have occupied since August 21.

Yet Wednesday boss Paul Sturrock can boast a goal-threat of his own in Jones.

The Trinidad and Tobago international made it four goals in four games since joining on loan from Sturrock's old side Southampton.

Sturrock said: 'He was my first signing at Southampton and has done well for me. He has a lot of rough edges but I'm scared to teach him a few things in case he dries up in front of goal. I'm happy to leave him as a free spirit.'

Jones' goal came after a mix-up between central defender Curtis Davies and keeper Marlon Beresford.

Beresford should have claimed a high ball just inside his penalty area but Davies needlessly headed it away from him and Jones pounced to steer home into the unprotected net.

Luton boss Mike Newell said: 'It was a goal that could have been avoided. Curtis knows he has made a mistake. He can't let the ball bounce before dealing with it but he'll definitely learn from his mistake.'

'Overall, I'm pleased that we came back into it. It is a point gained for us. Wednesday will cause other teams a lot of problems so I'm not too down about the draw.'

Wednesday's lead was wiped out within 30 seconds of the restart as Howard took his season's tally to 16 goals.

Wednesday looked to have escaped when a viciously swerving 25-yard shot from Steve Robinson crashed back off the bar.

But it fell to Luton's Ahmet Brkovic and the Croatian midfielder headed it back into the six-yard box where the lurking



STRONG RESISTANCE: Luton defender Chris Coyne jumps in to win the ball Picture: DAVID MUNDEN

Top of League One

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Luton	25	16	5	4	46	26	53
Hull	25	17	2	6	50	32	53
Tranmere	25	13	7	5	38	32	46
Bournemouth	24	12	5	7	42	31	41
Bradford	25	12	5	8	35	33	41
Sheffield Wed	25	11	7	7	44	33	40
Hartlepool	25	12	4	9	40	37	40
Bristol City	25	10	9	6	45	33	39

Howard nodded home. Sturrock said: 'Luton caught us cold with their goal but I was pleased with my side's attitude and character. This is a difficult place to come to — it is a fortress for Luton.'

'I think my players can take heart from this performance. They now know that we can certainly be a force in this division.'

Luton, now clinging to top spot on goal difference, could have won the game

after 81 minutes. A precision pass from Paul Underwood cut through Wednesday's back line to set up a chance for Rowan Vine.

But the forward, on a season's loan from Portsmouth, saw his shot beaten away by keeper David Lucas.

Wednesday almost clinched all three points in stoppage time. A free-kick from substitute Chris Bunt found its way through a sea of bodies before landing at the feet of Jones. It was no more than a half chance and the striker could not get sufficient power behind his shot to beat Beresford.

Wednesday keeper Lucas twice denied Luton with fingertip saves as he tipped away efforts from Howard and skipper Chris Coyne.

LUTON (4-4-2): Beresford; Foley, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic, Nicholls, Robinson, Underwood; Vine, Howard. Subs (not used): Perrett, Showunmi, Keane, Seremet, Holmes.

SHEFFIELD WED (4-4-2): Lucas; Bullen, Lee, Wood, Heckingbottom; McGovern, Whelan, O'Brien, Hamshaw (Brunt 90min); MacLean, Jones. Subs (not used): Talbot, Greenwood, Poulter, Armstrong.

Referee: G Hegley (Hertfordshire).