



Luton Town 1 Sheffield Wednesday 1
TOM LEECH reports from Kenilworth Road



**MATCH
FACTS**



Luton Town: sford; Foley, Coyne, Davies, Davis; Brkovic, Robinson, Nicholls, Underwood; Vine, Howard.
 Subs (not used): Seremet, Perrett, Keane, Holmes, Showunmi.

Referee: Grant Hegley
 (Hertfordshire)

GOALSCORERS:
 Luton: Howard (46)
 Sheffield Wed: Jones (44)

SHOTS ON TARGET
 Luton: 9
 Sheffield Wed: 5

SHOTS OFF TARGET
 Luton: 3
 Sheffield Wed: 7

CORNERS
 Luton: 9
 Sheffield Wed: 2

OFFSIDE
 Luton: 7
 Sheffield Wed: -

BOOKINGS
 Luton: -
 Sheffield Wed: -

ATTENDANCE: 9,500

HATTERS STAR MAN:
KEVIN FOLEY
 Young full back defended well and supported attack with some exciting runs

■ Back on terms: Steve Howard (left) heads home on 46 minutes against Wednesday. Grit and determination (below) from Paul Underwood, back in the Luton side

Howards keeps Hatters on top

IT may only be on goal difference but Luton Town begin 2005 where they left off in 2004 – on top.

Hull City have eaten away at Hatters' lead but this hard-fought draw with Sheffield Wednesday keeps Mike Newell's men sitting at the top of the pile... for now.

Steve Howard's 16th goal of the season just after the break cancelled out Kenwyne Jones' fortunate opener for Wednesday, which came moments before half-time.

Kenilworth Road was packed to the rafters but the biggest crowd of the season saw Hatters denied time and time again by some dogged defending from Wednesday. Meanwhile, championship rivals Hull beat Huddersfield to go level on points with Luton but Newell insisted he was not downbeat.

"I'm doubly disappointed to give away the goal in the manner we did. But the lads picked themselves up and worked hard for the point. I'm not too upset about the draw and I certainly couldn't fault the players for effort today," said the Hatters boss.

"Wednesday will cause teams problems. I believe they'll take points off the teams around us – and I'm more than happy for them to do that!

"If you'd have told me at the start of the season that we'd be top at this point I'd have taken it.

"There are plenty of twists and turns left in this league so I'm not worried. The lads have had a sniff of what can be achieved this season and they want more."

It was never going to be easy as Wednesday had clocked up four successive away wins before yesterday's game.

Newell made just one change from the side that drew 2-2 with Colchester on Tuesday. Former Owls trainee Peter Holmes was replaced by fit-again Paul Underwood.

The midfield clearly benefited from having the left winger back in the side as Luton stroked the ball around with speed and thought.

But they had to wait until the 14th minute before Hatters had a shot on goal – captain Kevin Nicholls' effort not having enough pace to really test David Lucas.

Wednesday showed plenty of determination but gave Marlon Beresford – another Hatter who began his career at Hillsborough – little to do.

The half looked to be petering out to a stalemate until a minute from half-time disaster struck.

A long ball was played up for Jones to chase but it seemed covered by either Curtis Davies or Beresford.

However, in a breakdown in communication both players went for



the ball with the young defender heading over Beresford leaving the lurking Jones to put the ball into an empty net for his fourth in four games since joining on loan from Southampton.

If Wednesday's lead was daylight robbery – justice was served in the first minute of the second half. Newell's men ran out supercharged and Howard levelled the score with a classic header.

The one-time Wednesday transfer target latched on to Ahmet Brkovic's clever touch across goal to send a bullet header past Lucas. The Croatian reacted quickest when Steve Robinson's 30-yard blast cannoned off the crossbar.

It clearly rattled Wednesday who opened up and almost went back in front on 50 minutes. Tricky winger Matty Hamshaw ran from box to box before crossing for Steven MacLean whose free header was kept out by a superb one-handed save from Beresford.

From then on it was all Luton. Nicholls was driving Hatters on from midfield and both Sol Davis and Kevin Foley were getting forward as much as possible pushing for the winner.

A Nicholls free kick was well saved on 79 minutes but the chance of the game came seconds later. Underwood battled to regain possession and put a pass through that finally split the Owls defence. Vine sprang on to it and was one-on-one with Lucas but the striker's blast was straight at the body of the Wednesday 'keeper.

Newell insisted there were no major injury concerns ahead of tomorrow's away game at Peterborough but hinted he may make some changes

"With the game being so soon after this one I'll probably have to freshen the side up but it'll just be a case of resting tired legs," he said.

