

LATE WINNER SEES OFF LUTON'S MAIN RIVALS

SEAN DEMPSEY / PA

LUTON TOWN (0) 1

Brkovic 89

HULL CITY (0) 0

04/05

★★★★★

Croatian uses his head to seal win

FIFTEEN MATCHES TO go and the finish line is in sight for Luton Town. When Ahmet Brkovic headed in Steve Robinson's cross from the right wing with 80 seconds of normal time left to beat Hull City, their nearest challengers, on Saturday, the possibility of a remarkable two-year run under Mike Newell, the manager, from administration and near bankruptcy to promotion began to appear a reality.

Certainly their supporters in a sell-out crowd at Kenilworth Road celebrated the final whistle as if promotion was now theirs for the taking. Having battered away at Hull for the whole of the first half, the team still had enough about them to summon up the late winner.

Newell admitted that he had considered taking off Brkovic, who along with Robinson was Luton's outstanding player on the day, because he was looking "a bit leggy". But Brkovic, a Croatian known to his team-mates as "Burko", has been at Luton long enough and experienced enough lows to appreciate the highs. "I was

feeling tired and was thinking, 'Shall I go for a near-post run?' I went for it and just got a flick on the ball. Promotion would be brilliant for me, the fans and everyone else at the club."

For all their possession, Luton were mainly restricted to shots from the edge of the penalty area. Robinson forced a good save from Boaz Myhill after controlling the ball in the area, while, on the hour, Damien Delaney bravely dived in to block Rowan Vine's shot.

"We were delighted with their efforts last season when we had a restriction of 20 players and we managed to keep the majority together. We always believed they were a good side," Newell said.

"They've got a good attitude, they want to do well for the side and they train hard every day. We dropped off the top for two games and I think it bothered them. Now there's a little daylight there, we're getting close."

Results elsewhere meant that Hull lost little ground to the promotion candidates, although that did not cheer Peter Taylor, their manager. "We are having a bit of a poor run, three draws and two losses," Taylor, who believes a second successive promotion would be his finest achievement as a manager, said. "But last year we lost three in a row twice and still won promotion."

RON LEWIS

Brkovic blows kisses to the sell-out crowd at Kenilworth Road after winning the game for Luton just before the end

