

Champagne is put on ice

HATTERS 3 SWINDON 1

LUTON number two Brian Stein admitted that table-topping Hatters couldn't play 'champagne football' every week after Luton ground out a win over Swindon.

But the bubbly must surely be on ice to mark promotion from League One as the Town saw off former players Andy King and Mick Harford to rack up 78 points at the top of League One.

Hatters are 13 points ahead of Sheffield Wednesday and Tranmere in third spot with nine games left to play leaving many fans working out which game will mark Luton's step up to the Championship.

But Stein said: "People are talking about promotion, but we just can't allow ourselves to think like that. We've been at the top for most of the 37 games and the lads are just focusing on carrying it on for another nine games."

Saturday's win saw Luton start slowly, but find themselves 2-0 up after skipper Kevin Nicholls' 13th minute penalty – his seventh converted spot-kick from eight taken this term – and Ahmet Brkovic's 15th of the season in the 27th minute.

Michael Proctor pulled one back for the Robins before half-time, but after soaking up pressure from the visitors after the break, Town made it safe when Peter Holmes capitalised on a goalkeeping blunder by Rhys Evans to walk home number three six minutes from time.

After last week's 5-0 drubbing of play-off hopefuls Bristol City, Luton were made to work much harder against the other League One West Country Robins.

And Town man-of-the-match Curtis Davies admitted: "Last week we walked all over Bristol City and the fans might have expected us to do it again, but it was tougher than we expected. But we went 2-0 up and even though they came back at

Stein: Battling win is as good as slick show!

us, it was all over when we got the third. A lot of teams come here and sit back. Swindon and Hartlepool are about the only two sides who have come here and had a go, which you have to give them credit for, but we've ended up scoring three against both of them because it gives us the space to get in behind them."

Swindon were aided by the knowledge of former Hatters Director of Football Mick Harford for their visit and Davies added: "The gaffer said to us before that Mick would know all about us.

"But he also said 'what's that going to do, because you're a good team'. We've got more strengths than weaknesses and we're difficult to stop at the moment."

On the promotion bid, Davies added: "I think we probably need about four more wins to guarantee promotion, but we want to win all the games we've got left and go up as champions."

Town's opener came after Matty Heywood fouled Brkovic following an aerial challenge in the box and Nicholls slammed home number 11 of the season.

A Sol Davis shot that deflected into Brkovic's path heralded goal number two before Proctor headed in Grant Smith's 34th minute corner to make it 2-1.

After the break Nicholls flashed a free-kick just wide and Paul Underwood hit the bar while substitute Christian Roberts went close for Swindon, but Holmes made it safe after Evans spilled Nicholls' cross.



Picture: Jane Sherlock

JUST FOR KICKS: Paul Underwood battles during the 3-1 win over Swindon.



BRIAN STEIN'S VERDICT

"THE lads are a bit disappointed that we couldn't put on a show like we did against Bristol City last week.

"But we've had to remind them that you can't play champagne football every week.

"Sometimes you have to battle and that was a battling performance from us out there.

"Swindon came to stifle us and they did that.

We weren't pleased with how we started, but we found ourselves 2-0 up and that tells you a lot about our team.

"The pitch wasn't conducive to great football and we struggled to play, but we defended well and put in a great team performance to get the win.

"The players are realising it's not about individuals; it's about the team as a whole."