



Luton Town 1 Blackpool 0
TOM LEECH reports from Kenilworth Road



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town: (4-4-2): Beresford; Foley, Perrett, Davies, Davis; Brkovic (Leary 89), Nicholls, Holmes, Underwood (Showunmi 80); Howard, Vine (Feeney 74). Subs (not used): Seremet, Coyne

Referee: Paul Armstrong (Berkshire)

GOALSCORERS:
Luton: Howard (15)
Blackpool:

SHOTS ON TARGET
Luton: 6
Blackpool: 2

SHOTS OFF TARGET
Luton: 8
Blackpool: 6

CORNERS
Luton: 8
Blackpool: 4

OFFSIDE
Luton:
Blackpool:

BOOKINGS
Luton: Davis (49)
Blackpool: Parker (38)

ATTENDANCE: 7,816

HATTERS STAR MAN: KEVIN FOLEY

When the nerves started to creep in to Luton's play the youngster gave a calm, mature display

Howard goal rocks battling Blackpool

STEVE Howard's 21st goal of the season was just enough to see off struggling Blackpool as promotion jitters almost got the better of Luton Town.

The League One leaders know that if third-placed Tranmere Rovers lose next week and they win at Bournemouth then they are guaranteed to be playing Championship football next season.

Manager Mike Newell's Luton side didn't convince against his former Blackburn team-mate Colin Hendry's Blackpool at Kenilworth Road yesterday, but Howard's first-half header and some resilient defending kept the title hopes alive and kicking.

"We're getting very close to automatic promotion now," said the architect of Luton's rise to the top.

"Every time we win it makes it that little bit harder for Tranmere. I personally think it's a big ask for Tranmere to catch us now and I don't think they'll do it.

"If you don't take your chances and it stays at 1-0 it can leave you in a vulnerable position late on. The crowd were a bit nervous and it spread to the players on the pitch.

"Blackpool put us under pressure in the second half but we held on. This time last year we'd have conceded late in the game.

"Blackpool are a decent side and have been on a good run recently. That said, we weren't at our best, especially in the second half.

"The players have had three games in a week and at this stage in the season it takes its toll. I think it caught up with us out there.

"It's all about getting to the finish line rather than trying to impress people. We've shown over 40-odd games so far why we are top of the league."

Newell decided to leave new signing Warren Feeney on the bench and kept with the same 11 that thrashed Torquay 4-1 on Bank Holiday Monday.

That win put Hatters back on top of the pile after the surprise home defeat to Barnsley allowed Hull City to lead the pack – albeit for just 48 hours.

Luton's start to the game was almost as bright as the visitors' tangerine kit in the April sun.

Early headers from Peter Holmes and Howard threatened to put Hatters in front before the pair combined to do just that on 15 minutes.

Holmes whipped in a corner and Howard was too quick and strong for his markers to contain, rising from six yards out to power his header past Blackpool 'keeper Lee Jones.

Hatters were making all the play and Kevin Foley's dynamic run deserved a goal on 24 minutes. The right-back



■ Steve Howard where he likes to be – in the thick of things against Blackpool yesterday. Right: New signing Warren Feeney, who came on as a second half substitute

dribbled the ball past two Blackpool defenders before playing a slick one-two with Ahmet Brkovic. Unfortunately the return ball was too wide for the Eire U21 international to get a decent angle on the shot and Jones saved comfortably.

Luton's complete dominance was leaving the Seasiders all at sea but Blackpool were nearly allowed back in the game on 34 minutes when Jamie Burns broke free from a suspiciously offside position.

The diligent Russ Perrett had tracked the run and his last-ditch block kept Burns at bay.

Blackpool looked rejuvenated after the half-time break and really took the game to Luton with Martin Bullock, arguably the most creative midfielder in League One, pulling all the strings in midfield.

Hatters may even have gone down to ten men when Sol Davis hauled back Keigan Parker when the Seasiders striker was clean through. But referee Paul Armstrong kept his red card in his pocket, preferring

to caution Davis as Curtis Davies' covering run meant the left-back wasn't the last man.

Newell tried to shake things up with the introduction of Feeney with 16 minutes to go as his forward line yielded only a penalty claim for handball in a dour second half.

The £150,000 man looked lively and nearly capped his debut with a goal on 83 minutes when he linked up with fellow substitute Enoch Showunmi.

Hatters hit the Seasiders on the break and Showunmi played a delightful ball over the top of the Blackpool defenders for his new team-mate to chase. Feeney took the ball down well and got a shot away from a tight angle that beat Jones but dribbled agonisingly wide.

The goal would not have only given Feeney a dream start, it would have made for a much more enjoyable end to the game as Blackpool threatened to sneak a point with some late pressure.

