

HOWARD DELIGHT

Steve's 21st goal of season boosts Hatters' chances



LUTON TOWN1
Howard (15)
BLACKPOOL0
BY ANDY MACKENZIE

LUTON edged closer to the League One title with three valuable points against plucky Blackpool, although they were far from convincing in a nervy second half showing.

Steve Howard powered the table-toppers ahead in the 15th minute with his 21st goal for the season as Hatters looked set to wash The Seaside's aside.

But after a strong first half showing failed to yield further goals, Luton got the jitters after the break as Blackpool set about upsetting the home side's promotion plans.

In the end, wasteful finishing from the visitors allowed Hatters to collect a vital win with just five games remaining.

And boss Mike Newell admitted: "We weren't at our best at all, but the result was the important thing."

"You will get games like that over a season where you just have to grind out a result."

"It's not about impressing people now, it's about getting ourselves over the finishing line."

"If people want to be impressed by us they should look at what we have done already this season."

"We're getting close to promotion now and if Tranmere are going to catch us they are going to have to win all six of their remaining games which is a big ask, to be honest."

Bathed in Bedfordshire sunshine, Luton started the better with Peter Holmes and Howard going close with early headers before they made the breakthrough after a quarter of an hour.

From Holmes' corner on the left, Howard rose higher than everyone to send a trademark bullet header flying past the helpless Lee Jones.

Town looked to build on the early goal, but after Howard twice went close again, Blackpool forced their way back into the game and almost equalised when John Murphy headed Keigan Parker's corner just wide after 34 minutes.

That spurred the visitors on and after the break Parker burst



Woe: Keith Southern

LUTON	B'POOL
51 Possession	49
9 Corners	4
2 Offsides	6
15 Fouls	17
1 Yellow cards	1
0 Red cards	0
5 Shots on target	1
5 Shots off target	6
0 Hit woodwork	0

LUTON: Beresford 7, Foley 9, Perrett 7, Davies 6, Davis 7, Underwood 6 (Shawcross 90), Nicholls 6, Brkovic 6 (Leary 90), Holmes 7, Vine 7 (Feeney 74), Howard 7.
NEXT GAME: BOURNEMOUTH (A) 09/04
BLACKPOOL: Jones 6, Grayson 6, R Edwards 7, Clarke 6, Cold 6, Southern 6, Bullock 7, Donnelly 6, Burns 6 (Shaw 90), Parker 7, Murphy 6.
NEXT GAME: PETERBORO (H) 09/04

behind the Town's defence only to be hauled down by Sol Davis, who was lucky to escape with just a yellow card.

Seaside's boss Colin Hendry said: "The referee saw it and it was his decision, but on another day that could have been red."

"I don't want to talk about refereeing decisions, but Kelgan was through and about to pull the trigger only to be denied that opportunity."

New Luton signing Warren Feeney almost made the game safe for Hatters when he pulled a shot wide in the 83rd minute after coming on in the second half as substitute.

But Blackpool had the better of the second period with Parker and Keith Southern coming closest to equalising.

Hendry added: "I was disappointed in the way we conceded the goal, but at the end of the day we gave a good account of ourselves against the league leaders who look like being promoted and that's a good yard-stick for us for next season."



Hatters on a roll: Luton Town's Peter Holmes, right, tussles with Simon Grayson while scorer Steve Howard holds off the attentions of Peter Clarke and Keith Southern in the clash at Kenilworth Road

