



Luton Town FC



MATCH FACTS



Hatters still looking for that promotion

Bournemouth 0 Luton Town 1
TOM LEECH reports from The Fitness First Stadium

04/05

ALL Luton Town eyes will be firmly fixed on the Tuesday night game between Brentford and Tranmere Rovers after Hatters' 11th away win of the campaign put them within touching distance of the Championship.

Automatic promotion couldn't be wrapped up yesterday, despite Enoch Showunmi's 84th minute winner, as third-placed Rovers defeated Stockport County meaning that they can still mathematically catch the League One leaders.

All Hatters now need to do is beat MK Dons on Saturday to be sure, but things could be sorted on Tuesday if Rovers fail to beat play-off chasing Brentford. Not that that should detract from Luton's superb victory on the south coast which kept title rivals Hull at bay.

Luton were forced to play with a man down for an hour after defender Russ Perrett saw red for a late foul on Cherries' James Hayter. But Mike Newell's men showed their resilience and class holding on and even outplaying Bournemouth the longer the game went on. Showunmi's sixth goal of the season late on was richly deserved as Hatters' tremendous travelling support warmed up for a promotion party.

"I couldn't have asked for more from my players," beamed Newell. "Even when we went down to ten men we were playing well and I felt the game was there to be won.



ATTENDANCE: 9,058

HATTERS STAR MAN:

Chris Coyne: the early substitute imposed himself on the game with a series of vital challenges that thwarted Bournemouth at every turn.

■ Howard shepherds the ball for Hatters as they look for that winner

Bournemouth had no clear cut chances in the second half and we took ours."

Newell also backed his centre half over the red card, saying: "I don't believe it was a sending off - Perrett missed the ball and the lad fell over him. Russ only had his eyes on the ball."

The half had started well for Luton with Rowan Vine going close on 13 minutes after Howard

took the ball off Marcus Browning's toes and teed up his strike partner from ten yards out. Despite the tight angle Vine beat Neil Moss in the Cherries' goal but the ball crept just wide.

The response was a stinging long range effort from midfielder John Spicer that Marlon Beresford had to be at full stretch to keep out.

Then came 60 seconds in which Perrett went from hero to zero. On

20 minutes the tricky Wade Elliott was played in with just Beresford to beat which he did with a precise chip. But the covering Perrett bailed Luton out with a timely block on the goal line and Hatters cleared to safety.

The Cherries sensed Hatters were vulnerable and quickly played a ball over Luton's back line for James Hayter to chase. But the Bournemouth striker's run was blocked by Perrett's late challenge. Luton were left to wonder whether Hayter would ever have caught up with the speedy ball which looked to be going out of play when referee Trevor Parkes sent Perrett off for being the last man.

With Hatters down to ten men Vine was sacrificed for substitute defender Chris Coyne, returning from a spell in the treatment room. But the returning Aussie didn't have too much to deal with for the rest of the half as Bournemouth failed to take advantage of their extra man. Another long-range effort - this time from full back Stephen Purches - tested Beresford on 40 minutes. But back came Luton a minute from half time with Howard's 25-yard half volley requiring an acrobatic save from Moss to keep the scores level.

After the restart Bournemouth still seemed uninspired and it was Luton who offered the record crowd some much needed entertainment. Howard headed wide from Curtis Davies' cross and captain Kevin Nicholls warmed Moss's hands with a 30-yard piledriver.

Newell took the brave step of bringing on two strikers as the

second half wore on with former Bournemouth man Warren Feeney and Showunmi introduced for midfielders Ahmet Brkovic and Peter Holmes. The move paid off on 84 minutes when Showunmi swooped to win the game for Hatters and inflict a fourth-straight home defeat for Bournemouth. Nicholls' corner was whipped into the Cherries' six yard box and not dealt with. A scramble ensued and Showunmi took full advantage cannoning his drive off the crossbar from close range.

There should've been a second at the death when Howard rose from a challenge from Eddie Howe to find the goal at his mercy. Showunmi was clear to his left but Howard went for goal with a wayward lob.

Afterwards Newell spoke about the need for Luton, who have led the pack for most of the season, to be named as League One champions.

The former Hartlepool boss had to settle for second place on the last day of the season two years ago when they drew with Rushden and Diamonds - handing them the title. Diamonds ate away at Hartlepool's lead - something Newell insists Hull won't do to his Luton side.

"I'm not bothered where we achieve automatic promotion to be honest. All my thoughts are now firmly fixed on winning this division. I've been in a similar position with Hartlepool and to lose the title after leading for so long is a bitter blow. I'd be majorly disappointed not to be League One champions now."



■ Paul Underwood gets the ball across