

Howard spares blushes

05/06

By Duncan White

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HERE was a lesson to the Premiership on how to entertain: four goals, countless chances, no bookings, no play-acting and a raucous atmosphere.

It may not have been the subtlest of games but it was some spectacle, fuelled by the sweat of the players and celebrated by the strained throats of the thrilled spectators.

It finished with honours even for these two sides who have adapted so differently to promotion to the Championship. It was a result that favoured the visitors.

Luton started this game in the same way as they introduced themselves to the Championship – with pace, power and self-belief. With 90 seconds gone, Mike Newell's

side had the lead as Steve Howard once again demonstrated his vaunted aerial prowess, thumping a near-post header beyond Wednesday goalkeeper David Lucas.

Paul Sturrock's side appeared feeble in the opening skirmishes, all the more so as Luton's superior physique was allied to a competitive intent that shamed their opponents. The visiting defence were in all-out panic; the home attack poured forward with gluttonous glee.

So it was all the more surprising when Wednesday levelled. Chris Brunt – by far the most threatening player in his side – drifted in a corner from the left and Graham Lee jumped well to head in at the near post.

A disbelieving Luton came back hard. Warren Feeney was twice denied by excellent

Lucas saves and Kevin Nicholls' chip went over.

Wednesday slowly clawed their way back into the fight and on 63 minutes took the lead, David Graham eluding Chris Coyne and tucking away a neat finish.

The improbable lead lasted just two minutes. Nicholls, the Luton captain, hit a fine cross from the left and Howard, again, nodded past Lucas.

Not that the Wednesday goalkeeper was to blame. He was in outstanding form and his second-half save from Feeney at close range was as good as any he can have made in his career.

Luton (4-4-2): Beresford; Edwards, Coyne, Perrett, Davis (Heikkinen 87); Brkovic, Nicholls, Robinson, Morgan (Showunmi 78); Feeney, Howard. **Subs:** Brill (g), Holmes, Keane.

Sheffield Wednesday (4-4-2): Lucas; Simek, Lee, Wood, Hills; Eagles (McGovern 78), O'Brien (Rocastle 78), Whelan, Brunt; Graham, Peacock (Bullen 72). **Subs:** Corr, Ross.

Referee: R Beeby (Northants).