

Man of the Match

Jason De Vos

THE Canadian skippered his side to a first win in a hard week and, in a formidably adverse situation with so many injuries. De Vos epitomised the team spirit and desire to give their all and was instrumental in keeping the Blues' first clean sheet at home since beating Cardiff City 1-0 on the opening day of the season. He won countless headers and combined well with Richard Naylor to limit Luton to clear efforts from inside the box. Even a dead leg did not diminish his desire, as De Vos led by colossal example.

The Championship

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Reading	27	20	6	1	54	14	66
Sheff Utd	27	18	5	4	50	25	59
Leeds	26	14	6	6	34	22	48
Watford	27	11	10	6	43	33	43
Crystal P	25	12	5	8	39	27	41
Wolves	27	9	12	6	32	23	39
Preston	26	8	14	4	30	22	38
Cardiff	27	10	8	9	35	30	38
Burnley	27	11	5	11	38	34	38
Luton	27	11	5	11	39	37	38
Norwich	27	11	5	11	32	33	38
Stoke	27	12	1	14	33	38	37
QPR	27	9	8	10	32	38	35
Ipswich	27	8	8	11	28	40	32
Southampton	26	6	13	7	27	28	31
Hull	27	7	9	11	26	31	30
Derby	27	5	14	8	33	38	29
Coventry	27	6	11	10	32	41	29
Plymouth	25	6	10	9	23	30	28
Leicester	26	5	11	10	27	33	26
Brighton	27	4	13	10	26	41	25
Sheff Wed	27	5	9	13	19	33	24
Millwall	27	4	10	13	20	39	22
Crewe	27	4	10	13	31	53	22

Passion and spirit make up for lack of brilliance

Hardy Hatters finally topped by Town's display of determination



THE measure of a team is how they cope with adversity and this Ipswich side showed an inner strength and spirit to be immensely proud of beating a hardy Luton side.

Granted, Luton highlighted why they have now gone eight games without an away win, and if they had showed anything like the finishing touch they clearly demonstrate at home, then they might have at least got a draw. But coupled with some excellent goalkeeping once more by Shane Supple and some dogged defending, the Hatters could not overcome the Blues' indefatigable spirit.

Nor could they respond when substitute Ian Westlake hit the winner after a superb piece of control to chest down a sublime 40-yard delivery by Darren Currie, before turning his shot past Marlon Beresford.

Of course, the first win in five games does not paper over all the cracks but finishing what has been, on the whole, a pretty wretched year on a

high, offers some hope for the coming weeks.

Town are equidistant between the play-offs and the relegation pack, with seven points separating both zones.

A year ago, the Blues were top of the Championship and looking promotion favourites – we all know how things worked out and how things have spiralled downwards since.

An appalling catalogue of injuries has compounded the already-fragile situation and losing Richard Naylor to suspension for the first game of 2006 today is not a great start.

But at least they can go into today's game at Stoke City in great heart after a victory borne from youthful exuberance and wily experience.

Stripped of Nicky Forster, Sam Parkin and Adam Proudlock through injury, and no doubt wounded by the reaction of playing one up front against Palace, Joe Royle went with a three-man attack.

Back by popular demand was crowd favourite Dean Bowditch, the enthusiastic Danny Haynes and old fox Darren Currie.

The freshness and play-with-no-fear attitude of Haynes lifted the Blues crowd, determined to be positive and get behind the team, or at least not give them a hard time.

The 17-year-old ran at the Luton defence and, while he got little joy for the most part from



LEADING BY EXAMPLE: Skipper Jason De Vos (right) is in no mood to let anyone past him, as Luton's overwhelmed striker Rowan Vine (No.9) finds to his cost



IPSWICH TOWN 4-3-3

Goals: Ian Westlake, 69. Bookings: None

31 Shane Supple	Some very good saves but will want to work on distribution	7
2 Fabian Wilnis	Calm defending and got involved good support work	7
6 Richard Naylor	Important stops and blocks and will be missed	7
4 Jason De Vos	Man of the match	8
15 Sito Castro	Very assured defending and passing, before injury	7
19 Jimmy Juan	Once again neat and tidy, now with added thrust	7
23 Owen Garvan	Plenty of quality, strong running and clever play in middle	7
3 Matt Richards	Outstanding workrate in midfield and defence	7
29 Danny Haynes	Terrific enthusiasm and unlucky not to score before fading	7
17 Dean Bowditch	Lots of good work and endeavour but scorned chance	6
10 Darren Currie	Looked jaded but still came up with sublime pass for winner	6

SUBS: 33 Ian Westlake (for Sito, 52) 7, 14 Dean McDonald (for Bowditch, 62) 6, 7 Jim Magilton (for Garvan, 75) 6, 26 Scott Barron, 34 Lewis Price.

LUTON TOWN 4-4-2

Goals: None. Bookings: Foley (foul, 56) Nicholls (foul, 84)

1 Marlon Beresford	Showed his experience and composure	7
2 Kevin Foley	Forced to get over-physical	6
26 Marcus Hekkinen	Controlled and composed	7
4 Chris Coyne	Looked strong and capable before hurting himself	7
6 Paul Underwood	Quick and sure defender who played good balls	8
7 Carlos Edwards	Exciting play but chose wrong option at times	7
11 Steve Robinson	Terrific work all round and menace around edge of box	8
8 Kevin Nicholls	Sturdy tackling from skipper	7
18 Ahmet Brkovic	Kept quiet and could not influence	6
19 Warren Feeney	Put himself about but poor touches	5
9 Rowan Vine	Never showed confidence needed	5

SUBS: 19 Steve Howard (for Feeney, 60) 6, 45 Leon Barnett (for Coyne, 63) 6, 16 Enoch Showunmi (for Vine 80) 6, 23 Dean Morgan, 33 Dean Brill.

Referee: Andy D'Urso (Billericay) 8
Attendance: 23,957
Pitch: Surprisingly good Weather: Dry and cold

TOWN	LUTON
5	SHOTS ON TARGET
6	SHOTS OFF TARGET
3	CORNERS
6	OFFSIDES
13	FOULS CONCEDED
0	HIT WOODWORK



HAPPY NEW YEAR: Above, Town give their fans something to celebrate as Ian Westlake (left) fires in the only goal of the game against Luton Town at Portman Road on Saturday. Left, Town's impressive young goalkeeper Shane Supple (left) successfully appeals for a push after Luton's Steve Howard had headed the ball in the net. Skipper Jason De Vos (right) is also in no doubt the effort should not stand. Right, teenager striker Danny Haynes wonders how he did not get his name on the scoresheet after shooting wide

Photographs: ANDY ABBOTT and OWEN HINES



Underwood and Co, he did unsettle them at times and tried to make things happen.

Chances were sparse but twice Haynes might have snatched a vital goal. Currie crossed for Bowditch to head down and Haynes had two attempts but could not force the ball in. Then, when Westlake kept ball in play and down the line for him, Haynes cut inside his marker but skewed his shot wide.

Currie looked totally exhausted, with misplaced passes and tired legs that could not get to the right places in time, but, as is his wont, came up with the pass of the week to pick out Westlake from deep for the goal.

Bowditch also took a knock in the win, after missing a great chance to boost his self-esteem and the manager's confidence in him when Fabian Wilnis played him through but the young striker's shot hit Berresford's legs and he scooped Haynes' blocked follow-up over the bar.

Town lost Sito Castro, who turned an ankle, and the Spaniard had played well at left-back before succumbing to the injury.

Skipper Jason De Vos epitomised the Blues grit and Town's tower of strength gave an outstanding display at centre-back, along with Naylor, to head, nudge, boot and scrape all sorts away from the goalmouth.

And, all the while struggling with a sore back and a dead-leg that also makes him a doubt for Stoke this afternoon.

While Supple made very good saves to deny Northern Ireland international Warren Feeney, future World Cup winger Carlos Edwards, who will be in Germany with Trinidad and Tobago, and Luton skipper Kevin Nicholls, De Vos also weighed in with a vital interception.

Feeney had laid off a cross by Foley and, as Steve Robinson looked a cert to score, De Vos slid in to poke to ball away for a corner.

The Canadian won virtually everything in the air and, when Luton eventually forced the ball home, Robinson was judged to have pushed Supple.

The 18-year-old Irishman showed great positioning and handling for the most part, although did drop a couple of balls, and provided a heart-stopping scary moment at the death, and his distribution was not as accurate as he might have liked.

He was overshadowed a little by fellow Irishman Owen Garvan, who showed maturity beyond his tender 17 years to have an excellent game in midfield before being withdrawn, no doubt with Stoke in mind.

Garvan made one run that typified his performance, when he picked the ball up from the edge of his own area, sprinted forward, skirting a couple of Luton players before playing an excellent ball with the outside of his foot down

the line for Haynes, who was only beaten by Underwood tackle.

Frenchman Jimmy Juan was in the middle of many of Town's better moments, linking well to get the game flowing, and, for the most part, kept possession well and added some thrust to the Town attack.

Fabian Wilnis linked well with Juan and one passage of play showed the Blues are still a good passing team but were rewarded with just a corner.

Dean McDonald went on for the injured Bowditch and showed he is prepared to shoot and give it a go as Town showed plenty of second-half purpose.

It was not a brilliant Blues display but it had plenty of passion and effort and there is little doubt that, while the youngsters are not the answer just yet, they offer great encouragement for a future that has to start now.