

Ipswich Town v Luton Town

@Portman Road, Saturday, December 31, 1pm

Davis' prediction

LUTON have not won away in seven games but are fresh from a 3-0 win over Brighton at home. Mike Newell will tinker with his team as Watford on Monday and Liverpool next Saturday, will be on their mind but you can still expect the Hatters to be a decent outfit.

Town's woes are well known and goal-scoring remains a problem, although they can plonk one in from a set play. Although Luton are one of those teams Town should beat, especially at home, they could well prove difficult at an anxious Portman Road.

I hope I'm wrong but sadly I can see it continuing to be a miserable festive period and the Blues to lose 2-1.

The Championship table

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Reading	26	20	5	1	52	12	65
Sheff Utd	26	17	5	4	48	24	56
Leeds	25	13	6	6	32	22	45
Watford	26	11	10	5	42	31	43
Crystal Palace	24	11	5	8	37	26	38
Wolves	26	9	11	6	31	22	38
Burnley	26	11	5	10	37	32	38
Luton	26	11	5	10	39	36	38
Stoke	26	12	1	13	32	36	37
Preston	25	7	14	4	27	21	35
Cardiff	26	9	8	9	33	29	35
Norwich	26	10	5	11	31	33	35
QPR	26	8	8	10	28	35	32
Southampton	25	6	13	6	26	26	31
Hull	26	7	9	10	26	29	30
Coventry	26	6	11	9	31	38	29
Ipswich	26	7	8	11	27	40	29
Derby	26	5	13	8	31	36	28
Plymouth	24	6	9	9	22	29	27
Leicester	25	5	11	9	27	32	26
Brighton	26	4	13	9	25	39	25
Crewe	26	4	10	12	28	49	22
Sheff Wed	26	4	9	13	17	32	21
Millwall	26	3	10	13	18	38	19

31 Shane Supple

15 Sito Castro 2 Fabian Wilnis 4 Jason De Vos Matt Richards

19 Jimmy Juan 23 Owen Garvan 33 Ian Westlake 10 Darren Currie

29 Danny Haynes 6 Richard Naylor

19 Steve Howard 9 Rowan Vine

18 Ahmet Brkovic 8 Kevin Nicholls 11 Steve Robinson 7 Carlos Edwards

6 Paul Underwood 4 Chris Coyne 26 Marcus Heikkinen 2 Kevin Foley

1 Marlon Beresford

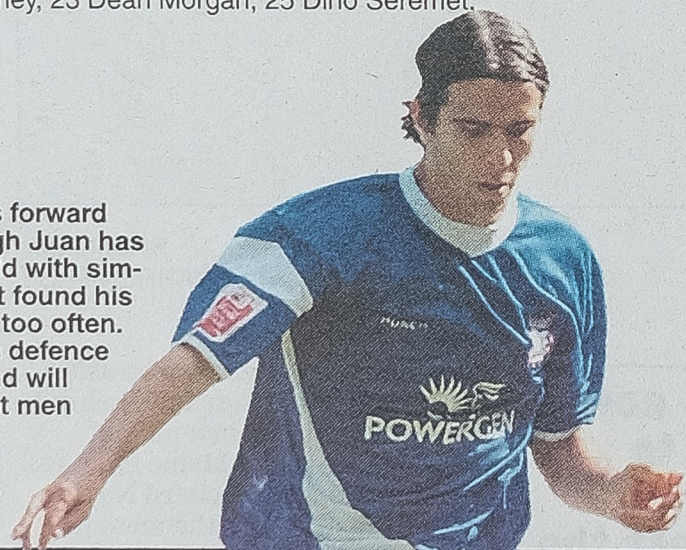
Ipswich Town subs (from): 7 Jim Magilton, 12 Jaime Peters, 14 Dean McDonald, 17 Dean Bowditch, 26 Scott Barron, 34 Lewis Price
Luton Town subs: 10 Warren Feeney, 23 Dean Morgan, 25 Dino Seremet, 33 Dean Brill, 45 Leon Barnett

Name: JIMMY JUAN

Team: IPSWICH TOWN

Position: MIDFIELDER

THE gallic architect who gallops forward especially at set-pieces. Although Juan has shown his French flair in midfield with simple, short passes, he has not yet found his range with a telling ball forward too often. For Town to open up the Hatters defence they will need to be inventive and will look to Juan to pick out the front men and get the ball wide for a few crosses to come in, while being prepared to do defensive duties in front of the back four.



Name: AHMET BRKOVIC

Team: LUTON TOWN

Position: MIDFIELDER

THE 31-year-old Croat is enjoying his fourth season at Luton Town after deciding he would have more chance of progressing up the league than staying at Leyton Orient – how right he was.

Considered an above average hard-worker, he has banged in six goals from midfield and Brkovic has weighed in with his fair share of assists for a goal-hungry Luton.

He will need to be sat on, possibly with a man-marking assignment for Matt Richards, or he could hurt a fragile Town side.



MANINCHARGE

Andy D'Urso (Billericay)

STILL one of the most card-happy referees around showing seven reds and 65 yellows in just 17 games so far this season.

The Essex-based official last took charge of Town when they lost 1-0 at home to Watford in October.

OTHERMATCHES

Brighton v Millwall (1.00), Burnley v Sheff Wed (1.00), Cardiff v Southampton (1.00), Crewe v QPR, Derby v Reading (5.15), Leeds v Hull (12.00), Leicester v Norwich, Preston v Coventry (1.00), Sheff Utd v Stoke, Watford v Crystal Palace (1.00), Wolverhampton v Plymouth.

FOOTBALL

The big-match preview

Hatters boss pleads for concentration

Big games ahead for Newell's men

By Derek Davis

SHARP-SHOOTING Luton Town have been warned not to let minds wander to their big local derby with Watford on Monday and an FA Cup clash with Liverpool next week.

Hatters boss Mike Newell has told his players to focus on today's Championship game at Ipswich, as they look for their first away win in eight attempts.

He said: "I don't know what is going on in their minds but the most important thing right now is Ipswich. That is the only thing they can be thinking off, the Ipswich game."

After winning promotion from League Two last season Luton have maintained good progress in the Championship and currently sit in eight place, although Newell is convinced they can secure a play-off place come May.

Like Ipswich, Luton were in deep financial mire a few years back and still don't have much money to splash around, especially with average home gates on around 10,000.

Newell said: "We've money to spend, but it's not millions, and we won't be bringing in players just for the sake of it."

"We might not be able to afford the people we have in mind, but I will be looking to bring in young players to help strengthen the club in the future. I don't expect anyone to leave as I haven't had any phone calls, which I have to admit has surprised me. "I have always been confident that we can reach the play-offs."

"We have had a difficult month but every team has spells like that during the season."

"We haven't won a game that we haven't deserved to and on the odd occasion maybe I would like us to do that, but that is about learning and being more experienced."

Newell has built a bright attacking side with not very much money and has choices up front.

Leading scorer Steve Howard was a £50,000 buy from Northampton and his eight goals so far show he is



ATTACKING INTENT: Luton Town's Paul Underwood (right), whose side have been full of goals this season

Photograph: PA SPORT

carrying on the form that seen him score 96 goals in 207 appearances for the promoted Hatters.

Warren Feeney, a £150,000 purchase from Stockport County has hit six goals, despite tussling with former Colchester United loanee Rowan Vine for a starting place.

'We won't be bringing in players just for the sake of it'

— Mike Newell

Vine, a £250,000 buy from Portsmouth, has bagged three goals in five starts after an injury-interrupted season.

On top of that another ex-U's striker, Dean Morgan, has scored five this season.

Couple that with the midfielders weighing in with goals, Ahmet Brkovic has knocked in six, Kevin Nicholls four, and you can see why Luton lead the league in shots on (168) and off target (170) and corners (191).

Newell is likely to tinker with his side that beat Brighton 3-0 at home on Wednesday with former striker Rowan Vine back in the starting line-up, although Feeney scored in midweek.

Newell said: "Playing up front is probably the hardest position in which to play four games in eight days."

"I have been thinking ahead to Ipswich, Watford and what I have got to do. You can't play four games in eight days and be at your best."

"Warren has been chomping at the bit to be involved after we left him out for a rest."

"It wasn't because we were unhappy with him but he has had his rest and he offers us a different option than the other two."

"It is a toss of the coin between the four strikers because they are all in form and you would be happy playing any of the them."

Midfielder Peter Holmes is the only injury concern for Luton, who have needed to use just 20 players all season, compared to 26 by Ipswich.

derek.davis@archant.co.uk