



BATTLING IT OUT: Jimmy Juan rises highest to win the ball as Town press forward in the match against Luton.

All pictures: ANDY ABBOTT

Home victory gives new heart to Town

IPSWICH Town gave their fans hope that 2006 will see a march up the Championship table with a welcome victory at Portman Road today.

Ian Westlake scored a 69th-minute goal as Ipswich won at home for the first time since beating Plymouth on November 5. The depleted side deserved their success, and were cheered off the field at the end by their delighted – and relieved – supporters.

Ipswich were resolute in defence with all of the back four performing well and Shane Supple impressive in goal, despite a few dodgy kick-outs.

Westlake struck with a well-taken goal following a pass from Darren Currie and

Ipswich Town..... 1
Luton Town..... 0

although they had to hold on a bit at the end, this was a better display by Town.

Luton were not the best side seen at Portman Road this season, but they were no pushovers and went close on a few occasions to a goal.

But with their younger players showing their worth, this was a much better day for the Blues.

Ipswich made four changes from the side beaten 2-0 at Hull City on a freezing Wednesday night.

Striker Dean Bowditch – one of four teenagers in the starting line-up – was back

in the side after not being included on the substitutes' bench for the previous two matches.

With just one goal in his last 26 Championship games the 19-year-old was looking to end the year on a high.

Another crowd-pleasing decision by manager Joe Royle was to have 17-year-old Danny Haynes in the team, with changes necessary following injuries sustained by Nicky Forster and Gavin Williams at Hull.

Town have now lost their three experienced strikers in Forster, Sam Parkin and Adam Proudlock, and this did not help their cause as they searched for their first goal in three games.

Matt Richards, 21 on Boxing Day, was recalled, while the fourth change saw Owen Garvan come back into midfield.

Jim Magilton and Ian Westlake dropped to the bench.

It was a sunny start with the game kicking off at 1pm and the temperature having improved by several degrees in the last 24 hours.

There was the prospect of protests from a minority of fans if Town failed to improve on a record of just two wins in their last 14 games.

They had slipped down the table into 17th position, but could expect no favours from a Luton side, promoted last season and doing well under manager Mike Newell.

The Hatters' skipper Kevin Nicholls is the brother of Heybridge Swifts keeper Paul.

The pitch had been covered by the special tent at Portman Road and was in

perfect condition at the start, although cutting up a bit later.

Evidence of the recent bad weather was around the outside of the pitch, with snow piled two foot high in places.

Town began confidently attacking the South Stand with Naylor and De Vos continuing their central defensive partnership and Haynes, Bowditch and Currie up front in a 4-3-3 formation.

Sito was at left back, and when the ball rebounded from his side of the pitch into the six-yard box, Supple had to move smartly to snatch the ball – getting a kick in the face from Feeney for his trouble.

It looked intentional but controversial referee Andy D'Urso only gave a warning to the number ten while Supple received treatment.

Town were passing well, with Bowditch