

CHAMPIONSHIP

Watford live

in hope of closing gap

05/06

By Duncan White

WATFORD	1
LUTON TOWN	1

WATFORD may have guaranteed their place in the play-offs but, despite being pegged back by local rivals Luton, manager Adrian Boothroyd refused to give up his quarry — automatic promotion.

"I don't want to talk about the play-offs," he said. "Our opponents still have difficult games to come and I think we can still do it." The draw elevated Watford above Leeds into third place on goal difference, but Sheffield United remain nine points ahead. It is a formidable gap.

What with an alcohol ban in the stadium and an early kick-off, yesterday's high noon confrontation between rivals of mutual loathing ended up being more of a groggy brawl.

Both sides went swinging wildly in a physical match. Watford connected first, the excellent Marlon King leaping to deftly loft the ball over Marlon Beresford. Luton drew

level with quarter of an hour left, Ahmet Brkovic hooking in at the far post. Until then the early kick-off had blunted the edge of the atmosphere.

After opening the scoring on 38 minutes King cut in from the right and saw a rasping shot saved. Chris Eagles was unlucky not to score from only two yards.

The fight went out of Watford after the break, though. Brkovic's goal, with 15 minutes left, shook them awake and, led by the rampaging King, they fought their way back. With a few minutes left, Watford thought they had done it. Malky Mackay headed in firmly and Vicarage Road went barmy, until the awful realisation of the linesman's raised flag.

That would have been harsh on Luton who had performed in spirited fashion. Yet despite their success as a promoted club, manager Mike Newell, the Luton manager, was intolerant of any complacency. "I wanted to be where Watford



Packing a punch: Watford manager Adrian Boothroyd and (right) Luton goalkeeper Marlon Beresford challenges Jay DeMerit

are. That might be over-ambitious, but I know what this side is capable of," he said. "I need to know soon how ambitious the club are. I need to know if they are as ambitious to keep me as I am to keep these players."

Watford (4-4-2): Foster; Dooley, Mackay, DeMerit, Stewart (Chambers 67); Eagles (Bangura 67), Mahon, Spring, Young; King, Henderson. **Subs:** Chamberlain (g), Carlisle, McNamee. **Goal:** King (38). **Booked:** King, Dooley.

Luton (4-4-2): Beresford; Foley, Heikkinen, Perrett, Davis (Barrett 18); Edwards, Robinson, Showumni, Brkovic; Howard, Feeney (Vine 69). **Subs:** Brill (g), Morgan, Holmes. **Goal:** Brkovic (74). **Booked:** Showumni, Howard, Heikkinen.

Referee: M Dean (Merseyside).

