



Luton Town FC

Luton 1 Ipswich 0

TOM LEECH reports

from Kenilworth Road



Howard ploughs a lone furrow...

05/06

LUTON warmed up for next Sunday's grudge match against bitter rivals Watford with a battling win over Ipswich Town.

Steve Howard's neat glancing header – his 15th goal of the season – from Ahmet Brkovic's cross nine minutes from time was all that separated the two sides who both seem destined for mid-table this time around.

But after seeing his side record their 11th home win manager Mike Newell reiterated the importance of finishing the season strongly.

"I don't want to go into the start of next season on the back of a bad final three or four games," he said. "We want to finish positively and I'm confident with just a couple of new faces over the summer we'll be pressing for a play off place next year.

"The Watford game is the biggest match of the season for the supporters and we're looking forward to it. But it was important to concentrate on Ipswich today. This is a side who were in the Premiership not so long ago and although they've changed a few personnel it's still a scalp for us."

In truth it was a dull affair which only livened up when Newell made a treble substitution. The Tractor boys, as Ipswich are known, looked as if they'd used their farming equipment on the Kenilworth Road turf which Newell admitted didn't help his side's natural passing game.

"I'm really pleased to get all three points especially as the pitch wasn't conducive to a game of football," said the Hatters boss. "It was a dogged performance. I didn't think it was going to be our day after we missed some chances early in the second half but it was a perfect cross from Berko and a good header by Howie."

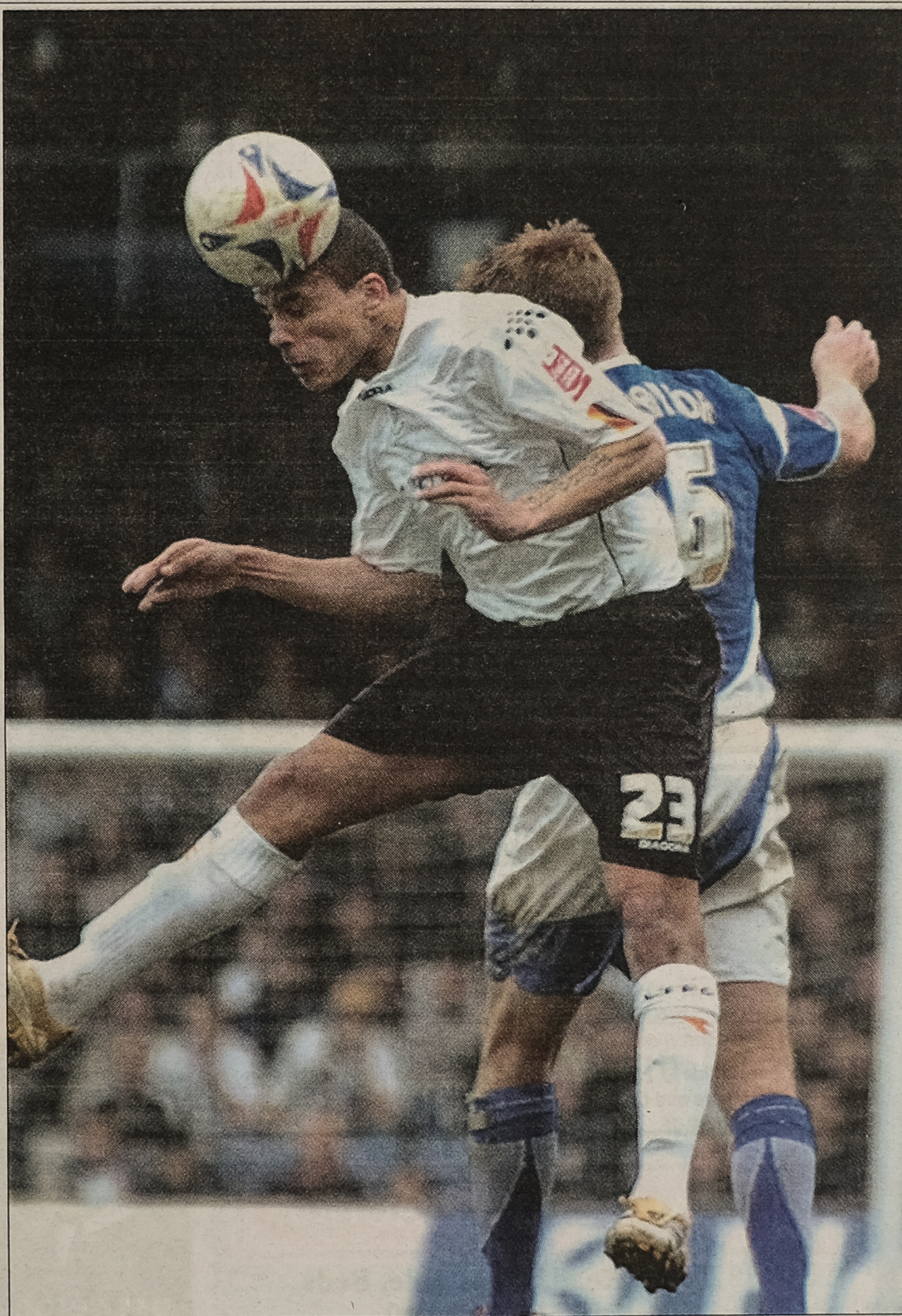
With the news that Paul Underwood is to miss the remainder of the campaign after breaking his arm at Brighton last week, Newell was forced to reshuffle his pack bringing in Russ Perrett to partner Chris Coyne in defence and moving Markus Heikkinen into midfield.

Newell also dropped Warren Feeney and Brkovic from the side that drew 1-1 last weekend and recalled Rowan Vine and Dean Morgan.

Ipswich sat just a point above the Hatters before yesterday's game with both sides too far away from the chasing pack to be serious play off contenders.

With neither side going up or down there seemed little to play for but try telling that to Sol Davis who signalled Luton's will to win with a scything challenge on Tractor boys' right back Sito Castro on six minutes.

The East Anglian 'derby' of sorts clearly meant as much to Ipswich 'keeper Shane Supple who was less than subtle when he clattered into Steve Robinson 20 minutes later leaving the Northern Ireland international on the floor.



The first half contained few chances – Ipswich managed just one attempt on goal – but the linesman's flag was in constant use as the Hatters kept getting frustratingly snared by the Tractorboys' offside trap.

Luton's best effort came just after the half hour mark when Robinson was thwarted from close range by Supple. The move began after some good work down the left from Morgan who played in Vine. The striker's deft touch took him around Jason De Vos before he unselfishly squared it for Robinson. But the Ulsterman was forced to shoot on the move and Supple clawed his fumbled effort to safety.

Hatters had two opportunities to go ahead early in the second half. First on 51 minutes when Vine pounced on James McEveley's poor back header, but the striker hit the side netting from a tight angle. Then two minutes

later Vine dribbled into the box before picking out Carlos Edwards on the edge of the area whose low shot was only kept out by a decent Supple save.

The game, like Luton and Ipswich's season, looked to be running out of steam until Newell introduced Feeney, Brkovic and Enoch Showumni and the breakthrough came on 81 minutes.

Brkovic seemed to take an age before crossing from the left but it was for good reason as Howard timed his run to perfection sending a powerful header flashing past Supple from 15 yards out.

In fact Howard might have had a hat-trick late on as he sent a free header wide on 86 minutes and with almost the last touch of the ball fired a toe-poke straight at the feet of the Ipswich 'keeper after a clever one-two with Feeney.



Subs: Feeney (Vine 75), Brkovic (Morgan 75), Showumni (Heikkinen 76) Subs not used: Brill, Bell

MAN OF THE MATCH

STEVE HOWARD

Striker deserved goal in all-action display



■ Midfield duo Dean Morgan (top left) and Steve Robinson in action for the Hatters against Ipswich