

BRKOVIC PEGS HORNETS BACK

Watford1
Luton1

By TOM COLLOMOSSE

AHMET Brkovic grabbed a second half equaliser for Luton at Vicarage Road that all but ended Watford's hopes of automatic promotion to the Premiership.

Marlon King's gave the Hornets a first half lead but Brkovic struck 13 minutes from time and Adrian Boothroyd's men, who have taken just one point from their last three matches and are nine points adrift of second-placed Sheffield United, look destined for the play-offs.

In the 22nd minute, Lloyd Doyley's mistake let in Steve Howard, who mis-hit his shot — only for Watford skipper Gavin Mahon to head the ball straight to the unmarked Warren Feeney, who volleyed wide.

Kevin Foley provided another example of Luton's poor finishing when, unchallenged by the home defence, he was allowed to carry the ball from inside his own half before dragging a shot wide from 22-yards.

And in the 36th minute, King showed Mike Newell's men how it was done with a superbly taken goal. *05/06*

Latching onto Ashley Young's clever flick, King outpaced Markus Heikkinen before placing a perfectly judged, first-time lob over the head of goalkeeper Marlon Beresford for his 20th goal of the season.

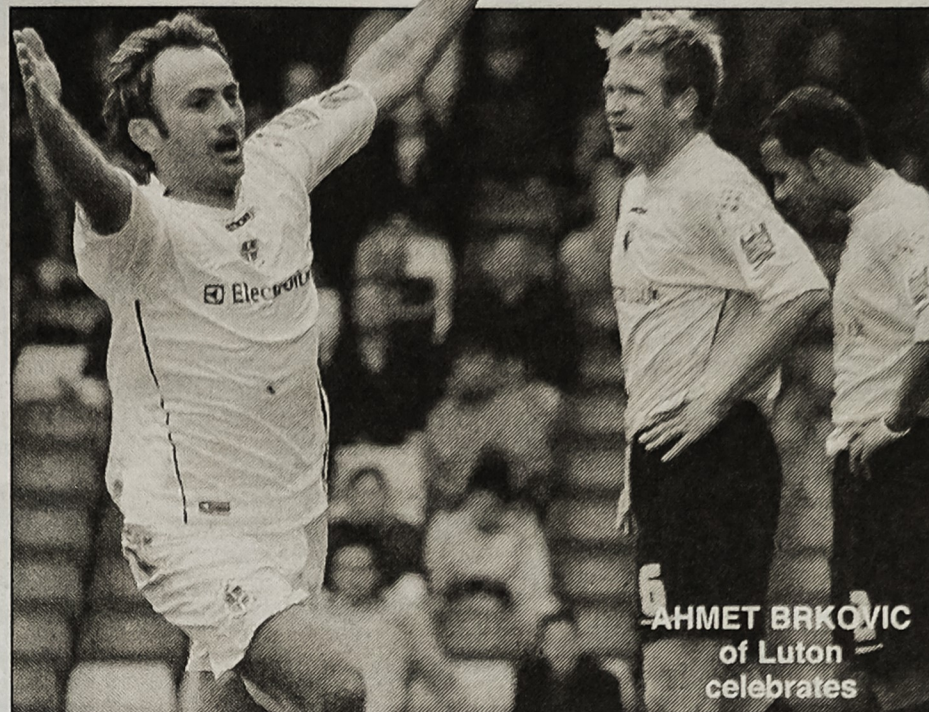
Luton almost levelled in the 43rd minute when Watford keeper Ben Foster — shaky throughout the half — struck an intended clearance against Carlos Edwards, but recovered to dive on the ball just in front of his goal line.

In first half stoppage-time, Beresford kept his team in it by saving well from King and Chris Eagles.

Foster had endured a dreadful first half, but he redeemed himself after the interval by making two crucial interventions.

First he denied Leon Barnett — a first half replacement for the injured Sol Davis — with an impressive reaction save after the defender's 15-yard volley had flown through a crowded penalty area in the 50th minute.

And 15 minutes later, Foster made a fine low stop to his right to keep out Steve Robinson's close-range shot after the Watford defence had



AHMET BRKOVIC
of Luton
celebrates

failed to clear Brkovic's cross from the right.

Young — one of Watford's best players this season — made a speedy incursion from the right and hit a 15-yard shot that was blocked by Heikkinen after 69 minutes.

But in the 73rd minute, Luton scored the equaliser they probably

deserved when Edwards' long throw from the right reached Brkovic, who prodded the ball into the net at the far post.

Watford defender Malky Mackay headed in Young's free kick late on, but the goal was disallowed for offside, and in stoppage-time Beresford saved brilliantly from King.

Boothroyd has sights on play-off glory

WATFORD boss Adrian Boothroyd claimed his side would be the team to beat in the play-offs after the draw with Luton secured a top-six spot.

"If we do end up in the play-offs, the other teams will look around, and none of them will want to play us," Boothroyd said.

"I know this — because we are a good team. We are still thinking about automatic promotion, because there are still plenty of tough fixtures

coming up, and plenty of points to be won.

"We faced relegation last season, so to secure a play-off place is progress — but all we are thinking about is promotion."

Boothroyd continued: "We didn't get going in the second half.

"We allowed Luton to gain momentum, and it was only a matter of time before they scored.

"We came back into it after that

and had a couple of chances — but we cannot expect to win games if we don't turn up for 35 minutes of the second half."

Luton manager Mike Newell said: "I'm happy to get something from the game, because we have not done that enough this season.

"If we had picked up more points on our travels, we could have been where Watford are, but I was pleased with the performance today."