

# SHOE-TING STAR

## Holmes boosts Cobblers' play-off push

BY MIKE WALTERS

**RICKY HOLMES** accused Portsmouth of "short memories" after the mercurial winger was life and sole of the Cobblers' party.

Axed by Pompey and exiled to train with the youth team, just months after picking up the club's player of the year gong, Holmes is already more than halfway to lining up 10 green bottles as man-of-the-match awards since he joined Northampton in January.

From 20th at the turn of the year, and looking over their shoulders at the Conference, the Cobblers are suddenly within striking distance of the play-offs.

Luton, who slipped out of the play-off places for the first time since October following their sixth defeat in a row, we can deal with in shorthand.

Apart from Alex Lawless opening the scoring 38 seconds into the second period, the Hatters were poor.

A proud club's climb back from the

boondocks has stalled, and if man-tank Steve McNulty's hamstring injury is anything more than a twinge, their bid for back-to-back promotions is likely to fall short.

Luton, 1-0 up when skipper McNulty retired hurt, were simply not streetwise enough to stop the rot of a ghastly losing streak without him.

Manager John Still complained about the "crazy" penalty decision for handball against Michael Harriman which led to Holmes' equaliser from the spot, but the best team won.

As for matchwinner Holmes, by far the classiest act at windy Sixfields, why on earth did Pompey let him go?

Unable to train, apart from swimming, for two weeks and with an ice pack clamped to his sore right knee, he said: "Portsmouth is a bigger club than Northampton but we are seven points above them in the league and that's what matters.

"I was voted player of the year there last year, but some people in football have short memories. I played with an

injury at the start of this season and didn't do myself any justice, but the gaffer didn't keep faith with me.

"They didn't really explain much but I was frozen out and training with the kids. I wouldn't say I was a bad egg, but I've enjoyed a new lease of life at Northampton.

"I've been given a licence to play and I've got six bottles of champagne to show for my time here already. The lads are all joking that I need to build an extension.

"There's always one club who come from nowhere to make the play-offs, and that team might be us."

James Gray's late winner ensured justice was done, but Still (left) remains upbeat about the Hatters' chances of getting back into the play-off picture.

He said: "This team is capable of four or five wins, and that's what we'll be trying to achieve."

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### MATCH STATS

|     |                  |     |
|-----|------------------|-----|
| 53% | POSSESSION       | 47% |
| 10  | SHOTS ON TARGET  | 2   |
| 2   | SHOTS OFF TARGET | 1   |
| 4   | CORNERS          | 7   |
| 10  | FOULS            | 13  |
| 1 0 | CARDS            | 4 0 |

### THAT'S THE GRAY TO DO IT

James Gray and Lawson D'Ath after Northampton's late goal sealed the points

**NORTHAMPTON:** Duke 6, Moloney 6, Collins 7, Cresswell 6, Newey 6 (Carter 64, 6), Taylor 5, Byrom 5, Holmes MOTM 8, O'Toole 6 (Toney 64, 5), D'Ath 6, Gray 6 (Diamond 89).

**LUTON:** Justham 6, Harriman 5, McNulty 7 (Lacey 56, 5), Kinsella 5, Smith 5, Lawless 6 (McGeehan 81), Drury 5, Doyle 5, Wilkinson 5, Benson 4, Cullen 5 (Miller 69, 5).

REF: Graham Scott ATT: 5,668