

Men's Premier Division

Browne happy to secure a play-off spot but has his sights set higher

by Dave Wright

HAMPSTEAD and Westminster player-coach Kwan Browne said the club had reached their first target of the season by making the play-offs, but they are now setting their sights even higher.

The Londoners sealed fourth place in the Premier Division by beating Reading 5-4 in a thriller at Sonning Lane on Sunday.

They raced into a two-goal lead, only to find themselves trailing 3-2, but they were back level by half-time and went on to seal a deserved victory in the second half.

Browne, who had another excellent game, said: "We are extremely happy to be in the play-offs. It was one of the goals we had set ourselves at the start of the season as I thought we had a good enough squad to compete at the top end.

"To have made the top four is a bit of a relief as we have had to work hard to get there.

"So we are happy to have achieved it and we are now looking to see how high we can finish in the league. We can't win it, but we have a chance of going second if we finish really strongly.

"But our next real main goal is to win the semi-final of the play-offs and get into the final, as that would be a great achievement for the club."

Hampstead's final two league fixtures are against play-off rivals Wimbledon (away this Sunday) and then home to Holcombe.

"They could be a bit of cat-and-mouse games because we if we reach the final we could be playing one of them for a place in Europe, so we might have to be a bit smart in the next couple of weeks," added Browne.

In addition to the win at Reading, he was particularly delighted with those who scored the five goals.

He explained: "We rely a lot on Matt Guise-Brown to score from penalty cor-

ners. He is the second-highest scorer in the league with 15 goals, all from corners, so it was nice to win a game without him scoring."

Mikie Watt bagged a brace with fellow Irishman Stevie Dowds also on target, along with Sam French and GB veteran Richard Alexander.

Dowds opened the scoring after five minutes and Alexander doubled the lead on 21 minutes.

However, within a minute, Reading pulled one back when Tom Carson, from near midway in his own half, lifted an aerial pass into the visitors' circle for Ben Boon to hook spectacularly into the net.

Three minutes later Monty Jefferson brought the scores level and when American Ajai Dhadwal netted a penalty corner in the 33rd minute it looked as though Reading would go in at half-time in front.

Yet

there was still time for Watt to make it 3-3 to end a thoroughly entertaining first half.

Amazingly, the second half was less than a minute old when French put the visitors back into the lead and the goal-fest continued with Reading player-manager Andy Watts squaring things up again on 44 minutes.

Hampstead, however, looked the more threatening side in attack and a defence-splitting pass by Browne enabled Watt to regain Hampstead's lead just after the hour mark.

It was a particularly busy day for Gary Noble in the home goal. With Tommy Alexander away on World League-2 duty with Scotland, he was selected for his first senior game for nearly two years and pulled off several excellent saves to earn praise from both Browne and Watts.

The latter added: "Even though he let in five, he was probably our best player today."

However, Watts did feel that Reading conceded some soft goals, putting the blame down to "naive" defending.

He commented: "When you score four goals at home, you don't expect to be on the wrong end of the score-line. That was frustrating."

Reading 4

Boon 22, Jefferson 28
Dhadwal 33 (PC), Watts 44

Noble, O'Connell, Mantell, Boon, E Carson, Shingles, Watts, Doherty, Dhadwal, T Carson, Cullimore.
Substitutes: Montgomery, Gerrits, Patel, Cullimore, Carter-Keall.

Hampstead & W 5

Dowds 5, Alexander 21,
Watt 34, 61, French 36

Ratcliffe, Alexander, Edwards, Roche, Calnan, French, Guise-Brown, Watt, Browne, Jakeman, McCabe.
Substitutes: Botha, Codling, Dowds, Chaffey, Loughrey.

Umpires: Lee Barron and Nick White



**KEY
PLAYER**

Kwan Browne
Hampstead