

REMEMBER WHEN...?

Mel Henderson looks through the archives at a previous encounter between tomorrow's opponents



NOT THIS TIME: David Johnson gets the ball into the net for Ipswich against Luton on Boxing Day 1974, but this effort was disallowed as Luton won 1-0

Photographs:
EADT

Blow to title hopes

74/75

RARELY can Ipswich have suffered a more costly home defeat than when bottom club Luton plundered both points on Boxing Day 31 years ago.

It cost them their unbeaten Portman Road record but, far worse than that, come the end of the season it was the biggest single factor in their failure to win the League Championship itself.

Bobby Robson's team went into the game as First Division leaders but thanks to debutant Ron Futcher, just 18 years old and whose twin brother Paul was in the Hatters' defence, they slipped to third.

And that was where they finished, two points adrift of champions Derby. Runners-up Liverpool had the same number of points as Town, 51, but a slightly better goal average.

It wasn't until the 1976-77 season that the authorities sensibly replaced goal average with goal difference, the former being a

system that involved dividing the goals scored by the goals conceded.

Had goal difference been in use two years earlier Ipswich would have finished second – 22 to Liverpool's 21 – and they also boasted superior scoring statistics to Brian Clough's title winners, 22 to the Rams' 18.

So – if you are still with me – it can be seen that had Ipswich beaten Luton they would have finished the season as champions for only the second time in their history.

Young Futcher's goal, scored almost two minutes into stoppage time, caused the biggest shock of the day – and Town goalkeeper Laurie Sivell had to shoulder the lion's share of blame according to one eyewitness account.

It is said that Sivell came out to a right-wing cross by Luton winger John Aston, who had helped Manchester United to their 1968 European Cup triumph, following a short corner routine, and his failure to get the ball presented Futcher

Ipswich 0 Luton 1

Football League First Division
December 26 1974

Ipswich: Sivell, Burley, Mills, Talbot, Peddelt, Beattie, Osborne, Hamilton, Johnson, Whymark and Lambert.

Luton Town: Horn, John Ryan, Buckley, Anderson, Faulkner, P Futcher, Jim Ryan, Husband, R Futcher, West and Aston. **Scorer:** R Futcher 90.

Referee: Derek Nippard (Bournemouth).

Attendance: 23,413.

with the chance to head home.

A 0-0 draw would have been a fitting result, said the report. While Ipswich, clearly missing the midfield influence of future England star Colin Viljoen, were short of creative ideas, the Hatters adopted ultra-defensive tactics aimed at pinching a point.

Town were unable to break down a defence that stuck to its task, fighting hard and using the back pass – it couldn't happen today – and the offside rule to good effect.

But Ipswich felt they had scored a perfectly good 77th-minute goal after a move involving George Burley, widely acknowledged as their best player on the day, and Mick Lambert.

When Lambert crossed into the middle David Johnson's shot was saved by Graham Horn but the keeper couldn't hold on to the ball, whereupon the Town man knocked it back towards the goal and John Ryan got the final touch as it crossed the line.

Referee Derek Nippard, who was in charge of the FA Cup Final in 1978 when Ipswich beat Arsenal, later explained: "The Ipswich No. 9 (Johnson) knocked the ball on with his forearm after the ball had come off the goalkeeper's body. That's why I disallowed it."

As Town toiled in vain to find a way through, it was hard to believe they had strolled to a 4-1 victory in the corresponding fixture at

Kenilworth Road three months earlier.

It was a measure of the home fans' frustration that several spectators in the West Stand threw cushions at a linesman and the referee was escorted to his dressing room by two burly policemen.

Come the end of the season, while Town were counting the cost of defeat, Luton were still relegated, although they did manage to climb into third bottom place ahead of Chelsea and Carlisle.

It was of no consolation to Ipswich, either, that their record of surrendering a mere six points and 14 goals at home all season was unrivalled in the top flight.

Looking at the Ipswich line-up, four of them went on to become managers – Burley, Mills, Talbot and Hamilton, while Sivell, Mills, Peddelt (now a police officer), Osborne, Hamilton, Whymark and Lambert still reside in the area.

David Johnson, who went on to play for England and can claim to have represented both Everton and Liverpool, is now one of the most popular speakers on the after-dinner circuit.

Apart from the Manchester United link with Aston, another member of the Luton team had also been on the Old Trafford playing staff and later went on to make a significant impact at coaching level.

Jim Ryan was youth coach when a host of youngsters, including David Beckham, Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt and the Neville brothers, graduated into the senior squad, and after spells with the reserves and the first team he now holds the prestigious job of Academy director.

John Ryan, no relation, went on to play for Norwich and Alan West, a classy midfielder, is now a minister at the Luton Christian Fellowship.



MAKING HIS POINT: Referee Derek Nippard waves away Ipswich Town protests after disallowing the David Johnson goal against Luton in 1974