

MARSH MAGIC SHOWS DIFFERENCE IN CLASS

TOWN FANS were left in two minds after seeing Fulham take the points at Kenilworth Road. From the Town's point of view it was a pathetic occasion, with little to encourage supporters. But the brilliance of Fulham's Rodney Marsh made it an experience to savour, despite the result.

The football brain of Marsh, allied with the amazing skills that draw in big crowds wherever he and George Best play, lifted him head and shoulders above the rest of the players.

Best was forced to play a supporting part as Marsh took the stage with impish ball control and a bright sense of humour.

At times he was dangerously close to taking the mickey out of the Town's stilted defence. To the uncommitted, it was a football feast, the kind of display which can only do a good job for football.

But the lesson was a hard one for those of us who want to see Luton Town making progress back towards the First Division.

Against Fulham the Town were second best in every department. Even when the Town were on top, in the first

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25 minutes, they couldn't produce a serious shot at goal.

The giant Ernie Howe had a fine match in Fulham's defence, towering over Dixie Deans and playing him out of the game.

Jim Husband wasted the Town's best chance with a weak shot after Alan West left him clear with a dummy from a cross by Deans.

Fulham goalkeeper Mellor had to go outside his area to head clear as Husband tried to reach a through ball from Buckley, and Aston had an angled shot pushed round the post.

A Town goal at that stage, as Alan Slough admitted later, might have made all the difference to the game. But Slough and John Evanson gradually overcame the Town's three-man midfield, thanks in part to some illegal tackling by Evanson which eventually brought him a booking.

His foul on Ryan was one of a series he perpetrated as the two teams fought for midfield supremacy. Fulham gradually won that battle, and the Town defence was cracked open in the 34th minute when Best and Cutbush worked the ball down Fulham's right for Les Barrett to score.

He shot low from an angle that left a lot of people asking how the ball was able to squeeze past Barber and the post.

The Town defence was still holding Best with considerable ease, and the Oak Road crowd enjoyed themselves immensely when the £500-a-game star put one shot over the bar, over the



● **CHEEKY:** Rodney Marsh, with Ricky Hill on one side and John Aston on the other, back-heels the ball out of danger.

stand and out of the ground.

There was more amusement when the Irishman tried to wriggle through the defence and was stopped by Paul Fletcher. "Foul," claimed Best. Referee Ken Baker thought otherwise, and eventually held up the game to give Best his first caution since returning to football in this country, for dissent.

But from then on the laughs were all at the Town's expense. They won 14 corners to Fulham's four, but could not turn them into goals, and Marsh underlined the finishing lesson with a killer goal after 64 minutes.

All the old skill was still there as he took on the Town defence, exchanged a brisk wall pass with John Mitchell, expertly drew Barber out, then beat him.

Fulham knew by then that the points were safe, and even the introduction of Ricky Hill for the injured Lil Fuccillo made no difference.

Marsh stole the show, trying tricks that other players wouldn't think of in training sessions. His cheeky sense of humour bubbled through, and even a foul by Faulkner which earned the Town defender a booking failed to quell Marsh's bright spirit.

I don't like to see the Town beaten, especially when their display is below the standards they can achieve.

But if they must lose sometimes, I would rather have the consolation of seeing them go down to a team which possesses something out of the ordinary.

Fulham had that, the Town hadn't. I shall be much more worried if players without the outstanding skills of Marsh ever come to Kenilworth Road and make monkeys out of the Town.

Division II Review

THE TOWN plunged eight places, to 17th, after the defeat by Fulham. But the Second Division table is still crowded: the Town are two points above bottom place and only four points behind the top teams.

Wolves, who entertain the Town on Saturday, are the new leaders. They cracked five goals, without reply, to dispose of Oldham at Molyneux, and are now the only unbeaten side in Division Two.

Chelsea share the lead, also with nine points from six games, and hold second spot on goal difference after a 2-1 home victory against Bolton, who are third.

Blackpool were knocked off the top of the table by a 2-0 defeat at Notts County, but along with Bolton and Oldham they are only a point behind the top two.

London pride was restored somewhat when all five Division Two teams from the capital won. Orient's 3-1 home win over Cardiff was their first victory of the season, and lifted them off the bottom for the first time. Alan Whittle, ex-Crystal Palace and Everton, marked his Orient debut with a goal.

The bottom club now, with three points from six matches, is Southampton, held to a 1-1 draw at The Dell by Nottingham Forest.

Charlton continued their climb up the table by winning 2-1 at Hereford, where Derek Hales scored and Peter Spiring didn't.

Just for a change, the weekend score-sheets were not littered with the names of ex-Luton Town players. MacDonald, of Arsenal, and Givens, of QPR, were the only other former Hatters on target.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0, FULHAM 2

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Barber; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Fletcher; Ryan, Fuccillo (Hill, 72 minutes), West; Husband, Deans, Aston.

FULHAM: Mellor; Cutbush, Strong, Moore, Howe; Slough, Evanson; Best, Mitchell, Marsh, Barrett. Sub: Bullivant, not needed.

THE GOALS: Barrett, 34 minutes, low angled shot from pass by Cutbush; Marsh, 64 minutes, brilliantly constructed and taken after a dribble and one-two with Mitchell.

ATTENDANCE: 19,929, the day's third highest in the Second Division, behind Chelsea and Southampton, and the Town's best gate since the visit of Manchester City — and Rodney Marsh — in April, 1975.

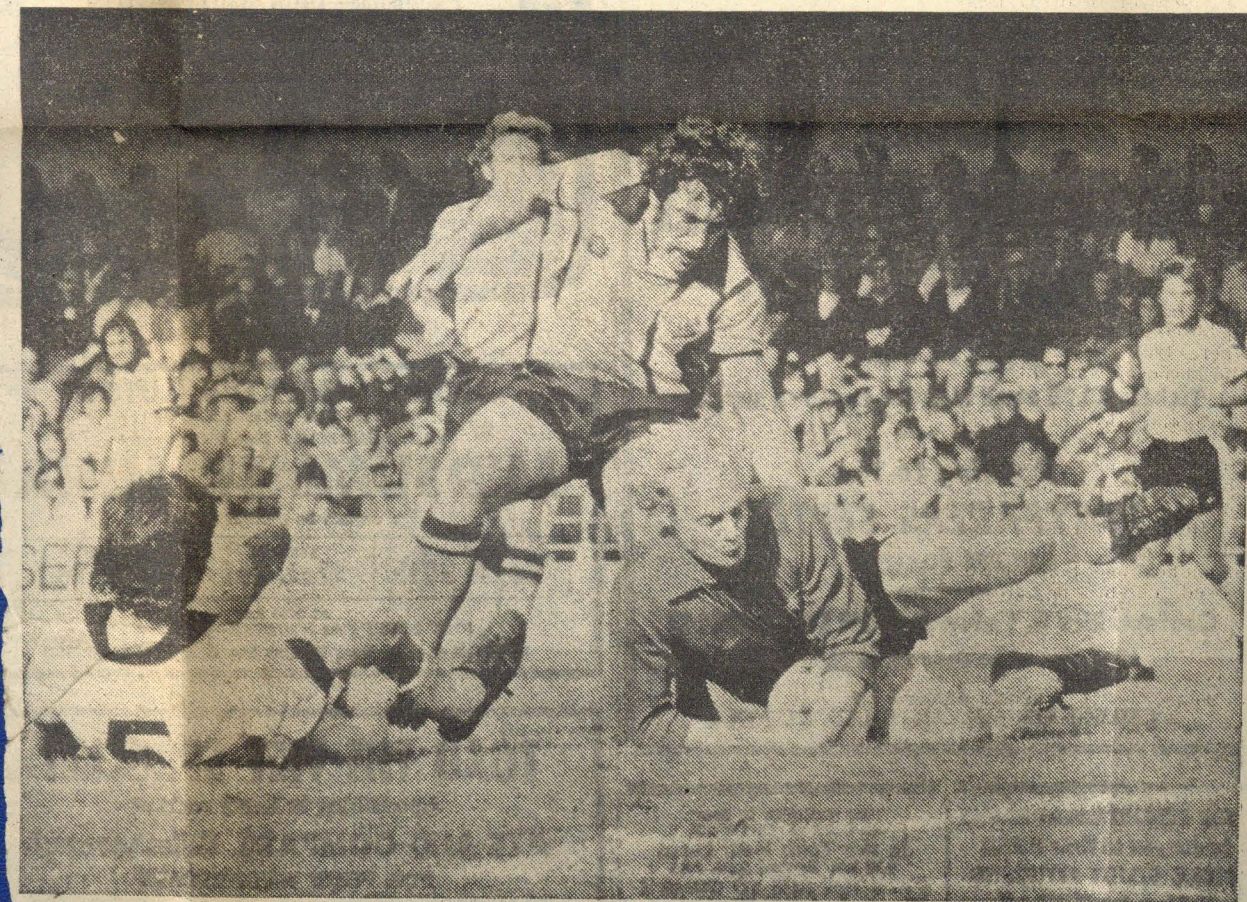
REFEREE: Ken Baker, Rugby, former policeman, pounded the Kenilworth Road beat pretty well.

BOOKINGS: John Evanson, Fulham, for a foul on Jim Ryan; George Best for expressing dissent; John Faulkner, for a foul on Marsh.

ENTERTAINMENT: Rotten for those who wanted the Town to win. But Marsh turned on some great stuff to make it a match to remember.

RECORD SMASHED: This was the Town's first home defeat since they lost 3-2 to Oldham last November, a run of 14 games unbeaten at Kenilworth Road.

DANGER SIGNAL: The Town have now taken only one point out of the last three games, two of which were at home.



● **DIXIE DEANS**, on one of the few occasions he was able to elude Fulham centre-back Ernie Howe, is foiled by goalkeeper Peter Mellor.