

KILLER GOAL HAS TOWN PONDERING

78/79

REFEREE ERIC READ was the scapegoat at Cardiff as Luton Town manager David Pleat pondered another away defeat which leaves his team still struggling to escape from the relegation zone of the Second Division.

By common consent the Bristol ref. once a hero for his handling of the infamous Chelsea pitch invasion at Kenilworth Road, missed a foul which led to Cardiff's shock opening goal.

But in the end the Town had only themselves to blame for losing a match in which they always looked the better of two poor teams. They equalised through a fluke eight minutes from time, then conceded a late killer goal just when it seemed that their unambitious defensive game would achieve the point Mr Pleat wanted.

David Moss was left on the sub's bench, with Paul Price recalled to play as sweeper behind the back four, tactics which had taken an away point against promotion-chasers Stoke City.

But the policy was all but wrecked in only the 12th minute by a crazy Cardiff goal. It started when the Town won a free kick near the touch-line, a couple of yards inside their own half.

Kirk Stephens and Ricky Hill chose to play it back towards their own goal, instead of looking for a positive forward move, and Hill's pass put Mal Donaghy under pressure from Ronnie Moore as the defender shaped to make a 30-yard back pass.

Moore clipped Donaghy's ankles — even Cardiff manager Richie Morgan admitted that later — but Mr Read and his linesman missed the offence and Moore took his chance carefully, racing through on his own and going round Jake Findlay before shooting into the net.

The goal forced the Town to be more adventurous, and full-backs Stephens and Mark Aizlewood both joined in attacks on the flanks.

But both sides failed to string decent moves together. Alan West had a sharp shot well saved and as the Town looked more skilled in build-up work they created, then missed, several reasonable chances.

Bob Hatton was the chief culprit. Twice he was put through at sharp angles. Greedy for goals to end his lean spell, he chose each time to try a shot, and each effort was beaten out.

In both cases colleagues had arrived quickly to be in position to take simple goals if the ball had been pulled back.

The equaliser was well deserved when it arrived in the 82nd minute, even though it was typical of the game in general. Alan West crossed into the goalmouth, and as Cardiff goalkeeper Ron Healey went to catch the ball his own defender, Dave Roberts, beat him to it and headed a spectacular own goal.

A draw was as much as either side deserved, but three minutes later Jake Findlay failed to react when Forbes Phillipson-Masters waited for him to meet a long cross, and Gary Stevens gratefully headed the winner from about seven yards.

Cardiff boss Morgan confessed: "It was a terrible match to watch, but we're grateful for the result. I would have been sick to see a goal against my side like our first one. But give credit to Ronnie Moore — what a professional, to have a trick like that up his sleeve!

"Luton really should have had a point — we are the luckiest side in the world to have taken both. There is no way we can claim that we deserved them from the way we played."