

BOSS BLOWS COOL ON TALK OF PROMOTION

News

1

Gap at the top cut to a point

Match Details

FULHAM 1, LUTON TOWN 3

Half-time: 0-1

FULHAM: Peyton; Peters, Strong (Kitchen, 76 mins), Money, Gale; Bullivant, Beck, Lock; Marinello, Mahoney, Davies.

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Pearson, not needed.

THE GOALS: David Moss penalty, five minutes, after he had been tripped by Gary Peters; Ricky Hill, 56 minutes, finishing a move he had started in midfield; Kevin Lock penalty for Fulham, 65 minutes, after Saxby fouled Davies; Bob Hatton, 80 minutes, after good work by Hill, Stein and Moss.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town three saved and five off target; Fulham six saved and five off target.

ATTENDANCE: 8,680 with a large Luton contingent in good voice.

REFEREE: Alan Gunn, Burgess Hill, Sussex — most definitely not a homer and turned down loud Fulham appeals for another penalty.

BOOKING: Tony Gale for dissent when ref gave indirect free-kick instead of penalty.

ENTERTAINMENT: Made by the result for Town fans, but Fulham were disappointing.

IF TOWN supporters can be forgiven for having their heads in the clouds as they look at the Second Division league table, manager David Pleat was taking great care to keep both feet on the ground at Craven Cottage on Saturday.

Talk in the Press-room was full of admiration for the way the Town had destroyed Fulham, and there were attempts to draw the manager into saying that his side looked good enough for promotion.

I don't think Mr Pleat is yet convinced, and he pointed out that although the early results have been good the Town have yet to meet the "big money" sides like Newcastle, Sunderland, QPR and Birmingham.

It's a fair point, but Fulham were no push-overs; they had conceded only one goal at home in their previous three unbeaten matches at Craven Cottage.

But they were up against an even better defence than their own, and the Town's major asset is the ever-growing confidence of the rearguard. Fulham's penalty in the 65th minute was the first goal put past Jake Findlay in 353 minutes of soccer.

Penalties played a decisive role in the Town's second away win of the season.

REPORT FROM
FULHAM BY
BRIAN SWAIN,
SPORTS EDITOR



David Moss netted one in the fifth minute, his eighth goal of the campaign, after he had been tripped as he tried to attack the goal after neat work by Ricky Hill and Bob Hatton.

Hatton scooped a chance over the bar from eight yards after Brian Stein laid the ball back, and Fulham thought they had an equaliser on a plate in the 31st minute.

Marinello, all but played out of the game by Kirk Stephens, was obstructed by the defender on the edge of the box, but referee and linesman were sure Fulham's appeals for a penalty were unjustified.

The indirect free-kick was blocked by Tony Grealish, and the Town were very much in control by half-time.

Their policy was simple and effective: Fulham were allowed to make progress as far as the edge of the penalty area. They pumped a string of high centres into the box.

And Findlay and his mates dealt with everything, with every clearance a springboard to counter-attack at speed before Fulham could get back in numbers.

It worked like a charm, with Fulham switching men in desperation. Findlay made two important saves early in the second half, before the Town scored a goal typical of their style.

Hill robbed Strong in midfield, counter-attacked quickly and gave Stein a run at goal. He lost possession, but as the ball ran loose Hill had followed up, and shot carefully under Peyton's body into the corner of the net.

Fulham always looked rocky when they were caught on the break, and Alan West and Stein might both have joined the score-sheet as the Town had the edge in defence and midfield.

The only hint of interruption to the Town's progress came when Mike Saxby made his only mistake of the game, pushing Davies on the far post in a scramble to reach a deep centre. Kevin Lock scored from the penalty, only for the Town to hit back ten minutes from time through another sweeping counter-attack.

The best pass of the day, a 30-yarder by Hill to Stein, cut Fulham's cover to pieces, and after the ball had been flicked into space via Stein and Moss, Hatton rifled in a shot which took a deflection on its way to the net.

Fulham manager Bobby Campbell complained that his side had more of the play and lost through defensive errors.

I thought he was half right. He ignored the fact that the Town looked much sharper through building quick attacks by accurate ground passing.

And the Town boss was nearer the mark when he said: "We're playing good football. We are put under pressure at the back and we contain it, and we are more resilient than we used to be."

"We are more relaxed and more confident because the players can see for themselves how well they are playing."

The need to give Mark Aizlewood match practice in the reserves had prompted the manager to include Andy Pearson as substitute, but on Saturday's showing no man in the first team deserves to be dropped.

The defence was tremendous, the midfield had the right mixture of brain and tackling power, and Hatton did an amazing amount of work in defence as well as in attack.

Moss kept his marker on tenterhooks without being as effective as he can be for 90 minutes, and Stein deserved at least one goal which could trigger off another consistent spell as a marksman.

But before we are all carried away in euphoria, perhaps the Town boss deserves the last word — in the end his team must be measured against clubs like Newcastle, Sunderland, QPR and Birmingham.

If the Town can keep up their current form, they are all dates to look forward to.

A GOALLESS draw at Birmingham bored most of the 19,000 customers, but left Newcastle United well pleased, still top of the Second Division, when defeat would have put the Town in the lead again.

Saturday's results saw the Town consolidate second place and close the gap on Newcastle to just one point. The two top teams are the only sides in the division with only one defeat in eight games.

Newcastle have 12 points, and a goals difference figure of plus six, while the Town have the best goals difference figure in the Second Division, plus 9. Their 16 goals makes them joint leading scorers in the division with Leicester, who have moved into third place.

Leicester have ten points after Denis Rofe scored both goals in a 2-0 win at Swansea, and Wrexham are also on ten points. Mick Vinter was their hero, scoring the only goal of the game four minutes from time against his former club, Notts County.

Seven clubs on nine points are headed by QPR, who drew 0-0 at Oldham. Cardiff, who entertain the Town on Saturday, are also on nine points after a 1-1 draw away to Bristol Rovers, who come to Kenilworth Road on Tuesday.

In the relegation zone Shrewsbury moved off the bottom with their second win of the season, 1-0 at home to Orient, leaving the Londoners in 22nd place.

They have four points from eight matches, the same as Burnley, who lost 2-1 at West Ham. Burnley and Orient are the only two teams in the division without a victory to their credit.



● GATHERING MOSS: The Town's winger is seen above being brought down by Gary Peters in the fifth minute.

● BELOW LEFT: Moss despatches the penalty to score his eighth goal of the season.



CELEBRATIONS: Ricky Hill's goal lights up Town faces.

PICTURES: RON PURVIS