

DISASTER ALL ROUND AS CARDIFF WIN

DISASTER WAS the word Town manager David Pleat used after a night of drama at Kenilworth Road as workaday Cardiff City became the second visiting team this season to take away two points.

With injuries, a barmy booking, idiotic antics from a couple of customers and a series of hard games still to come, the repercussions will still be felt next season, not least because this was probably the defeat that tips the promotion scales against the Town.

They were robbed of the services of leading scorer David Moss, and the worst refereeing we have seen at Kenilworth Road for a long time ensured that central defender Mike Saxby will soon have to serve his second suspension this season.

It has to be said that for all the failings of referee Michael Bidmead, of Chessington, the Town rarely looked First Division material. And they are shortly to be set their most serious test of all, as the depth of the squad comes under searching examination.

I believe the referee made his first mistake three hours before the kick-off. After a day of heavy rain, there were sea-gulls on the pitch before Mr Bidmead arrived to make his inspection. Water was lying on the surface.

Surprisingly, Mr Pleat was keen to get on with it. I hoped the referee would call it off, because it seemed to me that the conditions would be in Cardiff's favour, and all against a Town side which goes better on a firm surface, where quick short passes can be made accurately.

Infuriated

Mr Bidmead's performance when the game did get going infuriated players, manager and supporters.

In the first few minutes Mal Donaghy and David Moss were both hacked down by scything tackles. Free kicks were given, but there was no noticeable move by the ref to calm down the culprits.

Still limping from his early treatment, Moss provided the game's one moment of magical skills in the 24th minute. He caught defender John Lewis in possession, went on a dribbling run past three other opponents, and slammed an angled shot into the net for his 22nd goal of the season.

It needed a lot of bravery, because another last-ditch tackle flattened the winger, and his goal was his last contribution to the game. He was carried off, and



	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Chelsea	33	19	4	10	56	45	42
Birm'gham ...	32	17	7	8	45	29	41
Leicester	33	14	12	7	46	32	40
QPR	33	15	8	10	60	40	38
Luton Town ...	33	13	12	8	53	37	38
Sunderland ...	32	15	8	9	52	36	38
Newcastle ...	33	14	10	9	42	35	38
West Ham ...	30	16	5	9	40	28	37

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hospital x-ray examination disclosed an ankle ligament injury.

Steve White, relegated to sub when Bob Hatton was recalled, went into the action, but the Town's attack never again looked really fluent without Moss's pace on the flanks.

They looked the better footballing side, but White put three chances over the bar in the following 15 minutes, and Cardiff threatened damage with long through-passes which could catch defenders on the turn.

Gary Stevens stamped his personality on midfield. Jake Findlay had been forced to make a good early save from him, and he sent Ronnie Moore through for a chance which was lost when Saxby made a magnificent tackle in the penalty area.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, CARDIFF CITY 2
Half-time: 1-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss (White, 28 minutes).

CARDIFF: Healey; Dwyer, Lewis, Pontin, Thomas; Campbell, Ronson, Grapes; Buchanan, Stevens, Moore. Sub: Micellef, not needed.

THE GOALS: David Moss, 24 minutes, brilliant solo effort; John Buchanan for Cardiff, 44 minutes, free kick just outside the penalty area; Gary Stevens for Cardiff, 49 minutes, from Buchanan's cross.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six off target and seven saved; Cardiff two off target and four saved.

REFEREE: Michael Bidmead, Chessington — easily the worst we have seen at Kenilworth Road for a long time, with the yellow card kept in his pocket for too long, then brandished at Mike Saxby for a challenge which would not have been called a foul by some refs.

ATTENDANCE: 9,246 — not bad for a Friday night, but not the sort of gate that helps a club find money for new recruits.

ENTERTAINMENT: Spoiled by the swampy pitch, the referee and the result, but exciting in the second half as the Town went all out to save the game against a packed Cardiff defence.

BLACKSPOTS: David Moss carried off with severe ankle injury; Saxby over the 20-point mark after his booking; beer can thrown on to the pitch as tempers rose; Cardiff dressing room window smashed from the stand side as their players went for a soak.

The game's second turning point came a minute before the interval. Saxby was penalised for a foul on Stevens just outside the box, a few seconds after Kirk Stephens had gone to the dressing room for treatment after cutting his hand on a stone pushed to the surface by water.

Saxby's challenge may just have been illegal, although even neutrals in the Press box were surprised by the ref's decision. And condemnation was unanimous when Mr Bidmead gave Saxby a yellow card, and piled up more problems for a player who had reached 20 points before kick-off.

Booking

It was not an offence which warranted a caution, although the referee may have realised by then that he had let too much go and was losing control. I suspect the booking was his mistaken method of trying to reassert his fading authority.

With Town players still seething, and not concentrating on their jobs, John Buchanan lashed the free kick round the wall and into the net for the equaliser.

Four minutes into the second half, with Stephens still off the field, Stevens hit the Cardiff winner, with the Town's rearguard

hopelessly disorganised from a long cross by Buchanan.

From then on the Town bombarded Cardiff's goal, but were unable to find a way through a nine-man defensive barrier. A sharp shot by Hatton was the only serious threat at close range, and Ron Healey dealt with that capably.

Swamped

Attacks were swamped by the mud and opponents, who continued to tackle with venom. Phil Dwyer brought down Donaghy with another mis-timed challenge, and a customer in the terraces hurled a beer can—either at Dwyer or at the referee. It missed.

Hatton produced a terrible tackle a few seconds later to seek retribution from Dwyer. The referee either didn't see it, or didn't want to.

It became a slugging match, with the Town's normal midfield creative work bogged down in the mud, leaving Cardiff to become the first side this season to complete a double over the Town.

Welsh voices were singing in the bath when the Town's final disaster occurred: a dressing room window was smashed and several naked players were lucky to escape injury as glass splinters splattered the bath.