

MANAGER David Pleat was one of many surprised to read in some papers at the weekend that he was in line to be the new boss of Newcastle.

With Bill McGarry leaving at short notice on Friday, all sorts of rumours were flying about and one was that Pleat was the man Newcastle wanted. out of admiration for his record at Luton.

"It's rubbish," said the Town manager when asked if the story had any substance to it. "Newcastle have made no approach, and if they had I am not interested."

Chairman Denis Mortimer confirmed that if Newcastle did make an approach they would be told that the Town manager was not available.

Mr Pleat recently signed a new three-year contract, and any club which wanted to poach him can expect to be asked to buy it as a kind of transfer fee.

He has already turned down the chance to go to Sheffield United, where Harry Haslam is apparently destined for the role of general manager, with a team manager working alongside him.

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PRETTY SKILLS NEED SHARPER FINISH

THIRD DIVISION Reading were duly despatched from the Football League Cup on Tuesday night. But Town manager David Pleat confessed that while his side never gave him any fears about losing, they are still playing below their potential.

Having cruised to a 2-0 lead at Elm Park last week, the Town had done the hard work. But the 1-1 draw at Kenilworth Road was not a fair reflection on the difference in skills between the two sides.

Reading offered fighting spirit and a dogged refusal to cave in while the Town turned on plenty of pretty skills, but not enough basic finishing power.

Reading ought to have been thrashed out of sight, and the 3-1 aggregate win bore little reflection on the differences between the sides.

Instead, it highlighted the Town's major early season problems. The defence was rarely in trouble, the midfield ticked over sweetly, and the front runners squandered a stack of chances.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, READING 1
Half-time: 0-0
AGGREGATE: 3-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Aizlewood; Grealish, Hill, Antic; Stein, White, Heath (Ingram, 70 minutes).

READING: Death; Joslyn, Cheetham, Hetzke, Hicks; Bowman, Wanklyn, Sanchez; Earles, Dixon, Beavon. Sub: Williams, not used.

GOALS: Mike Saxby, header, 50 minutes, from Raddy Antic free kick; Steve Hetzke for Reading, 63 minutes, from 25-yard free kick.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town, six saved, 18 off target, one hit the bar; Reading, seven saved, seven off target.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good value for money, with Reading fighting to the end.

REFEREE: Peter Reeves, Leicester. Very kind to Mike Saxby — he should have been booked for leaving the pitch without permission to receive treatment for an injury.

ATTENDANCE: 5,707 — not as bad as it sounds for a match which most Town supporters might have thought was over before it kicked-off.

The bonus for the fans was that it amounted to a good night's entertainment as Reading came under heavy pressure, but caused occasional flutters in Luton heartbeats by threatening to grab goals on the break.

HARVEST

For them the second leg was something of a moral victory, but the Town's slick style must surely soon reap the harvest it deserves. If Reading got off lightly, Wrexham's spy in the stand must have gone home with plenty to worry about as the Welsh club prepare for Saturday's match.

The Town went into the game with an under-strength side, but enforced changes helped to show that strength in depth is improving.

Mark Aizlewood never looked out of place as stand-in for Paul Price, who had a stomach upset, and 18-year-old Sea-

mus Heath made his senior debut because David Moss was out through shingles.

Heath did more than enough to show that his growing promise is an asset to a club which has too often struggled with the bare necessities of a league squad.

A crafty chip shot just before half-time stretched Steve Death to the limit, and the teenager looked particularly useful when he wandered over to the right flank to give Aizlewood more space to break forward on the left.

Tony Grealish, Ricky Hill and Raddy Antic had too much experience and skill for the opposition midfield, with Hill in particular winning space and time deep in Reading's half.

Brian Stein had a remarkable game, constantly baffling the Reading central defenders, but unable to find the final touch when goals seemed certain.

HIT BAR

He laid on an early chance for Hill, and Reading were relieved to see Hill's 20-yard drive smash against the bar. He performed wonders to be first to the rebound, but cracked the ball narrowly wide with the goalkeeper still flat on the ground.

Death rescued Reading with a desperate save against Stein, but the defensive concentration at the other end was suspect when Kerry Dixon, formerly of Luton Town and Dunstable, forced Jake Findlay to pull off the

best save of the match.

A goal at the stage, midway through the first half, might have given Reading the encouragement they needed, but the tie was all but decided five minutes after the interval.

BOOKED

Roger Joslyn fouled Heath to stop the young winger, and was booked for his trouble. But the real punishment was dished out by Mike Saxby, who came through from the back strongly to meet Antic's free kick and send a glancing header into the net.

Reading battled on bravely, and after Pat Earles had shot wide from a good break they pulled back a goal in the 83rd minute.

Mal Donaghy was pulled up for a foul on Stuart Beavon, and Steve Hetzke, an impressive centre-half, drove the 25-yard free kick past the defensive wall into the top corner.

Jake Findlay explained later that he saw the ref's arm up to signify an indirect free kick, and had positioned himself to deal with a shot from a player standing a yard or two away.

The Reading goal came under heavy bombard-

ment as the Town made their class tell, but too many shots were off the target.

Frank Bunn was rested to give Steve White another chance, but he made little impression, and Godfrey Ingram, sub for Heath for their final 20 minutes, looked more likely to kill off Reading's resistance.

I have believed for a long time that he should be put into the side, and promised a run of several games, but more steadiness and concentration in front of goal would have improved his claims.

TRIBUTE

Reading boss Maurice Evans had no complaints at the final result, and paid tribute to a Town side which had the edge on skill if not in shooting power.

Mr Pleat was not blind to his side's failings. "We played very well early on," he said. "We were unfortunate not to score three or four goals. But it seems that when we play well and don't get anything for it we go into our shell a bit."

"This was a match when we didn't capitalise on our chances. I never felt that we were in danger of losing, but we can do so much better."

FIRST LEG DETAILS

READING 0, LUTON TOWN 2
Half-time: 0-1

READING: Death; Joslyn, White (Webb 26 mins), Shipperley, Morelino; Bowman, Sanchez, Beavon; Earles, Heale, Dixon.

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, Antic; Stein, Bunn (White 73 mins), Moss.

GOALS: David Moss, 59 seconds, from Frank Bunn's headed pass; Brian Stein, 65 minutes, from Moss's pass.

ATTENDANCE: 5,770.

REFEREE: Derek Lloyd, Fernhill Heath, Worcs.



● BRIAN STEIN missed a goal chance with a pass to Tony Grealish, who was caught offside.



● READING goalkeeper Steve Death won this mid-air clash with Brian Stein.