

SPORTS NEWS 1

Verdict on the Town's week ★★

DIVISION TWO LEADERS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	8	6	0	2	18	10	18
Sheffield Wed	8	5	1	2	9	5	16
Watford	8	5	1	1	11	9	16
Oldham	7	4	3	0	12	5	15
Chelsea	8	4	1	3	11	9	13
Grimsby	8	4	1	3	11	10	13
Norwich	8	4	1	3	12	13	13
Shrewsbury	8	4	1	3	10	11	13

BY KEEPING up the only 100 per cent away record in the whole of the Football League, Luton Town regained top place in the Second Division with their victory at Orient.

But it needed a shock result in Yorkshire to confirm their return to the top after a month's chase.

Sheffield Wednesday, leaders after winning at Kenilworth Road on September 12, put their unbeaten

Top Hatters

home record up against Wrexham, who hadn't so much as scored in their previous away games.

It added up to the classic ingredients of a surprise result, which duly arrived to end Wednesday's spell at the top.

Wrexham put three without reply past a defence which had conceded only two goals in its first seven league games of the season. The game attracted the day's biggest Second Division attendance, 18,526.

Watford moved up into third place, level on points with Wednesday, with a 3-1 home win over Barnsley in a cracking game which was much closer than the result suggested.

Oldham, who entertained the Town on Saturday, continued their march up the table, moving to within a point of second place with their fourth consecutive league win. Their 2-1 victory at Norwich pushed the home side down three places, to seventh.

Orient were left nailed to the bottom of the table with just four points from eight games. Bolton are also still in trouble, with six points, after Grimsby beat them 2-1 at Burnden Park.

Wrexham are on seven points, the same as Cardiff, who crashed 0-4 at home to Newcastle. The hero of Newcastle's first away win of the season was Imre Varadi, who got a hat-trick. Once with Letchworth, he was signed for Sheffield United by Harry Haslam, and then played for Everton before his transfer to St James's Park.

EASY DOES IT IN THE LEAGUE...

ENJOYING THE perfect warm-up for Tuesday's League Cup-tie, the Town barely flexed their muscles as they strolled back to the top of the Second Division by crushing Orient at Brisbane Road.

If he had been given a choice, manager David Pleat could hardly have picked a better contest to build up confidence for a cup run — if there is a more pathetic team in the Second Division than Orient I've yet to see it. This was their seventh game without a win, and their sixth in a row without scoring.

They were made to look even worse than bottom of the Second Division. Their best players, John Chiedozie and Joe Mayo, were sold off to precipitate the departure of Jimmy Bloomfield as manager, and the luckless Paul Went has been left with a bunch of men with no confidence and not a lot of ability.

The honourable exception was Henry Hughton, who knew he would have to work hard to cut down the danger from David Moss. He succeeded to some extent, but with the Town's midfield all-powerful, Moss was able to make a telling contribution anyway.

Lil Fuccillo again stamped his authority, and it was a pleasure to see Ricky Hill also getting further forward as the Town ran the game for almost every one of the 90 minutes.

Brian Horton has settled in perfectly, and with the defence rarely under pressure it was a

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

day when goals might have come from any of ten players.

The only criticism of the all-round performance was that the Town might have had five or six goals instead of just three, and there were a couple of times when mistakes at the back by Mal Donaghy and Mark Aizlewood would have been punished by a better side than Orient.

In fairness to the rear-guard, though, it must have been difficult to maintain position and concentration when the Town's superiority in all departments was so obvious.

Their passing and running into position was lovely to watch and they might have gone ahead in the eighth minute when Aizlewood and Brian Stein carved out an opening for Horton. His shot from just outside the box hit

the inside of the post and was cleared.

Orient's best attempt came shortly afterwards, when there was a touch of hesitancy after a corner by Bill Roffey. Peter Taylor looked a scorer until Jake Findlay made his one and only serious save of the day.

The Town were in charge from then on, with Stein and Steve White pulling defenders all over the place with quick runs as the Town's midfield controlled the flow of the game.

Aizlewood and Kirk Stephens were able to enjoy a run-out as auxiliary attackers and by the end of the afternoon only Donaghy and Mike Saxby hadn't forced Mervyn Day into action.

Orient were chasing shadows as the Town put together a string of flowing moves, and two goals in

five minutes ensured that the 100 per cent away record was maintained.

DEFLECTED

The build-up in each case was delightful, even if there was a touch of luck about the opener, in the 20th minute. Hill, White, Stein and Moss were involved as the ball was worked from right midfield to left-wing, and Aizlewood blasted in a 25-yard low shot which went into the net with a deflection off Nigel Gray.

Five minutes later another incisive move went down the Town's right. Stein took his marker out to the wing, back-heeled cheekily, and Stephens rammed a low cross into the goal-mouth for Hill to score, after timing his forward run perfectly.

CRUISED

Hughton cleared an overhead shot by Stein off the line to keep the half-time score down to two, and Tommy Taylor did it again early in the second half.

As Orient looked more and more dispersed, the Town cruised through the second half, and scored their third in the 74th minute when Horton and Stephens raided down the right-wing. Stein's shot was blocked, but the ball ran free and White hammered a first-time shot into the net from the edge of the penalty area.

PRESSURE

The result left the rival managers with two different problems — Mr Pleat was not sure that he wanted to be on top of the table this early in the season, facing the prospect of a string of opponents who will all view Luton Town as the team they must beat.

Mr Went, always an honest and dependable centre-half, called his team's display "disastrous" and added that he thought it would take a long time to get things right. I suspect he's going to find out a lot more about real pressure this season than Mr Pleat.

ORIENT DETAILS

ORIENT 0, LUTON TOWN 3 Half-time: 0-2

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Saxby, Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill (Antic, 77 mins), Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss.

ORIENT: Day; Hughton, Gray, Cunningham, Roffey; T. Taylor, Margerrison, P. Taylor; Godfrey, Moores (Silkman, 33 mins), Jennings.

THE GOALS: Mark Aizlewood, 20 minutes, 25-yard low drive after lovely build-up, shot deflected in by Orient's Nigel Gray; Ricky Hill, 25 minutes, brilliantly engineered and finished; Steve White, 74 minutes, shot from edge of the box after another sweeping move.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved, nine off target and one hit the post; Orient three saved and four wide. Corners: 7-5 to Orient.

ENTERTAINMENT: A delight for Town supporters, with Orient powerless to compete with a series of quick and clever movements based on accurate passing.

ATTENDANCE: 5,084, with at least half of them from Luton.

REFEREE: Alf Grey, Norfolk. Enjoyed an easy run as much as the Town did.

HIGHSPOT: The Town are back on top of the Second Division, two points clear of the field.

...BUT CUP-TIE IS HARD GOING

AFTER THE elation of seeing the Town go to the top of the Second Division, the shock of the Welsh jinx striking again all but silenced their fans at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday.

Wrexham, as lowly and unfancied as Cardiff had been a fortnight earlier, produced enough fire and fervour to become the third team to beat the Town at home in five outings.

On a night when his own football thinking was in question, manager David Pleat's only consolation was that it was the first of two legs in the Second Round of the Football League Cup.

Wrexham, 19th in the Second Division, but shock winners at Sheffield Wednesday on Saturday, played like a collection of Welsh dragons, with hard work, determined defence and quick counter-attacks.

And if midfield is the strength of the Town's pattern, Wrexham had a very basic answer — when they attacked on the break they tended to use the long ball to by-pass the Town's midfield men.

The Welsh tackling was grim at times — Joey Jones, Steve Dowman and Dixie McNeil were all booked for fouls.

LUTON TOWN 0 WREXHAM 2

But almost every tackle was made to count.

The manager had dropped Mark Aizlewood, moved Mal Donaghy to left back, and recalled Raddy Antic as a central defender. He figured that Donaghy would be a better stumbling block to the right-flank raiding of Steve Fox than Aizlewood.

The old question about changing a winning team was quickly posed. We shall never know if Aizlewood might have been more effective against Fox, but the manager's gamble came unstuck with the game barely two minutes old.

The Town's first attack was broken up, and with men pushed forward they were caught cold as Jones cleared and Fox sent the ball on down the right-wing. Frank Carrodus left Donaghy stranded, and the low cross from the by-line gave Mick Vinter an easy chance to put Wrexham ahead.

It was all uphill from then on, with the Town unable to get back into the game as Eddie Niedzwierki pulled off a superb save to push a swinging free-kick by Antic round the post.

He made further fine saves from Steve White and Ricky Hill, and was later given help by a post, when David Moss's free-kick beat him in the 73rd minute.

By that time, Wrexham had done the hard work, and were happy to defend against a Town side that never got going in any department.

The defence had slipped around on the greasy surface in the 23rd minute when a free-kick by Jones bobbed about in the area before Simon Hunt scored.

DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Saxby, Antic, Donaghy; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Aizlewood, not used.

WREXHAM: Niedzwierki; Jones, Dowman, Cegielski, Bate; Hunt, Fox, McNeil, Carrodus, Edwards. Vinter, Sub: Hill, not needed.

THE GOALS: Mick Vinter, 2 minutes, from counter-attack mounted by Steve Fox and Frank Carrodus; Simon Hunt, 23 minutes, after Town defence failed to clear when a free-kick by Joey Jones was lofted into the penalty area.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town five saved, seven wide, one hit a post; Wrexham five saved and three off target. Corners: 8-4 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 6,143, lowest of the season so far. Perhaps season ticket holders should have been offered a better deal.

ENTERTAINMENT: Interesting clash of tactics, with the Town never able to turn it on after going two down in the first 23 minutes.

BOOKINGS: Joey Jones for a foul on Moss, Steve Dowman for a foul on Fuccillo, Dixie McNeil for a foul on Stephens.

SILVER LINING: The Town are still good enough to win this one with a three-goal reply at Wrexham on October 27.

REFEREE: Victor Callow, Solihull — not as bad as some of the crowd's jeers suggested, but struggled to get the advantage law right.



Steve White, right, knocks in the rebound at Orient after Brian Stein's shot had been blocked.



PERFECT FINISH: Dick Hill, who had to score the Town's second goal at Orient.