

SPORTS NEWS 1

TOP THREE PULL AWAY

THE TOWN'S first win in Wales since David Pleat became manager maintained the only unbeaten away record in the whole of the Football League, and ensured that the Town stayed top of the Second Division.

Only goal difference keeps them ahead of Watford, but the top three teams are beginning to pull away—the Town are now six points clear of fourth-placed QPR, with two consecutive home games to come.

At the corresponding stage of last season there were two teams locked level on points at the top—West Ham and Notts County, both of whom went up.

But before we count chickens, the situation two years ago was that Newcastle, Luton and Wrexham were the top three, and they all missed out.

Today's league table's tend to have wilder fluctuations each week because of three points for a win.

Watford held second place with a 3-0 home win over Norwich, who have dropped ten places after being third a month ago.

Oldham dropped out of the top three when Sheffield Wednesday beat them 2-1 at Hillsborough to reclaim third place, three points behind the Town and Watford.

Queens Park Rangers moved up six places, to fourth, with a 2-0 home win over Leicester, whose manager Jock Wallace then called for the Omniturf pitch to be banned.

Luton Town have been the only winning visitors to Loftus Road, but the plastic pitch is a mixed blessing for Rangers. The change to old-fashioned grass every other week seems to baffle them—they have gathered only four points out of 15 possible in their away games.

Crystal Palace, who come to Kenilworth Road on Saturday, dropped five places, to 12th.

THE TOP TEAMS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	11	8	1	2	27	11	25
Watford	11	8	1	2	19	10	25
Sheff Wed	11	7	1	3	13	10	22
QPR	11	6	1	4	17	11	19
Charlton	11	5	3	3	16	12	18
Oldham	11	5	4	2	17	12	17
Chelsea	11	5	2	4	15	12	17
Blackburn	11	5	2	4	12	12	17

An 89th minute solo goal by Steve White, his 11th of the season, and his second in four days at Wrexham, came too late to wipe out a two goal deficit from the first leg at Kenilworth Road three weeks ago.

But it just might have been a different story if the Town had converted a penalty awarded two minutes into the second half.

Verdict on Luton Town's week ★★



● TOP SCORE: Steve White, on target in both visits to Wrexham this week, hits the goal which wrapped up the league points. Picture: MARK RICHARDS

WELSH DOUBLE UP, BUT A CUP KO

WREXHAM 0 LUTON TOWN 1

A WEEK AGO, Luton manager David Pleat went on record with the opinion that of this week's two games in Wrexham, Saturday's League match was the one he most wanted to win.

He got his wish — after being full of spirit and determination to take the Second Division points on Saturday, the Town failed to get going on Tuesday night and never looked like earning a place in today's draw for the third round of the Football League Cup.

SPORTS EDITOR BRIAN SWAIN REPORTS ON TWO LUTON TOWN SOCCER MATCHES AT WREXHAM

The first half had been less than entertaining, with Wrexham using a 4-4-2 formation, pulling everyone back behind the ball when the Town were in possession, and tackling hard and often.

Ricky Hill beat the off-side trap from a through pass by Brian Horton, but was foiled when Eddie Niedzwiecki raced 10 yards out of his area to make a spreading save.

The goalkeeper was booked for hands, but no doubt thought it worth it.

Dixie McNeil shot over from six yards on one of the rare occasions when the Town defence was caught out, and it looked

like stalemate after David Moss missed a penalty in the 47th minute.

The winger had an unhappy night, with Joey Jones staying close all the time, and dishing out some harsh treatment at times. The penalty was given when a linesman saw Steve Dowman push Moss over. Wrexham disputed the decision, but goalkeeper Niedzwiecki was able to make a fairly easy save because Moss put the penalty too close to him.

Clive Goodyear kept his place in defence, but was taken off in the 55th minute when the Town gambled by sending on Godfrey Ingram as substitute and playing with only



● STEVE WHITE

three men at the back. It gave them more attacking threat, but they struggled to get through an overcrowded midfield and Wrexham might have gone three up on aggregate in the 67th minute when the Town defence was caught stretched, but Kirk Stephens made a marvellous goal-line save from McNeil's header.

White's winning goal came from sheer determination and if the Town had shown as much of that in the first half as they did in the second the result could have been very different.

But Wrexham played much better on Tuesday than they had done in the league game, and Mr Pleat confessed: "Saturday's result may have made them more wary of us, and more determined. Wrexham seemed to have an attitude of 'they shall not pass' and they fought for every ball."

The manager refused to call the cup defeat a blessing in disguise, but Wrexham boss Mel Sutton commented: "Luton are a very good team. I think they are good enough to win promotion."

LUTON TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear (Ingram 55), Saxby, Donaghy; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; White, Stein, Moss.

WREXHAM: Niedzwiecki; Jones (Fox 65), Dowman, Cegielski, Baker, Hunt, Hill, McNeil, Carrodus; Edwards, Vinter.

THE GOAL: Steve White 89 mins, solo run and shot. Other goal attempts: Town five wide, three saved including penalty; Wrexham seven wide, four saved, corners 6-6.

ATTENDANCE: 3,453. **REFEREE:** Neil Midgley, Salford.

ENTERTAINMENT: No rousing cup-tie, but a reasonable second half.

Splashing out to kill a hoodoo

WREXHAM 0, LUTON TOWN 2

HAVING SAID before kick-off that League points were more important than a cup run, Luton manager David Pleat was given the perfect response by his team on Saturday.

They splashed out with a surprising amount of style on a pitch so wet that it seemed the game might not be completed.

In cold driving rain, tackles and passes were a lottery, but Wrexham were always second best in skill and control.

The Welshmen could not match the Town's astonishing enthusiasm for the task in hand, and two cracking goals wrapped up the points before half time to give Mr Pleat the pleasure of watching his first Town win in Wales since he became boss four years ago.

It would be unfair to pick out individuals as the stars of a Town performance which was an all-round team effort, but Clive Goodyear deserves special mention.

He came in for his first match of the season because Mark Aizlewood was injured, and played superbly.

By winning the ball consistently and making better use of it the Town ensured that Wrexham made the most mistakes. Players in all departments got into the right positions to support colleagues and give the man with the ball two or three options.

They almost went ahead in the 20th minute when Kirk Stephens set up an attack down the right and David Moss hit a volley which crashed against the bar. Brian Stein did well to reach the rebound first, but put the ball wide.

The opening goal, in the 28th minute, was a gem in build-up and finish alike.

Moss, Steve White, Stephens and Joey Jones were all involved as the Town built an attack from midfield. Jones blocked Moss as the winger tried to get in a shot, but the ball broke to Donaghy and from just outside the area he hit a crisp first-time drive into the top corner of the net.

A few seconds before half-time another break from midfield carved Wrexham open, and this time White was put in possession in front of goal and just outside the penalty box. The water splashed knee-high as he controlled the ball, drifted past an attempted tackle, and hammered his tenth goal of the season before any other defender could get near him.

Lil Fuccillo had another storming game in midfield, and his relentless driving power almost brought him a hat-trick, with one good shot saved and two more slightly wide of the target.

LUTON TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Saxby, Goodyear, Donaghy; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Bunn, not needed.

WREXHAM: Niedzwiecki; Jones, Dowman, Cegielski, Baker, Ronson, Carrodus, McNeil, Fox; Edwards, Vinter (65 mins).

GOALS: Mal Donaghy, 20-yard drive, 28 mins; Steve White, 20-yard shot, 44 mins. Other goal attempts: Town five saved, four wide, one hit the bar. Wrexham four saved and two wide. Corners: 7-4 to the Town.

ENTERTAINMENT: Surprisingly good on a very wet pitch. **REFEREE:** Howard King, Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales. **ATTENDANCE:** 4,069. **BOOKING:** Mal Donaghy for using his hands to cut out a through-pass.

WELCOME STATISTIC: The Town's first win in Wales, at the ninth attempt, since Mr Pleat became manager.



● FOILED: David Moss, who missed a penalty in the cup-tie, lashes in a volley which hit the bar on Saturday.