

SPORTS NEWS 1

Town Match Verdict ★★

|               |      |      |     |     |      |      |        |
|---------------|------|------|-----|-----|------|------|--------|
| LUTON TOWN    | P 14 | W 11 | D 1 | L 2 | F 32 | A 13 | Pts 34 |
| WATFORD ..... | 14   | 9    | 2   | 3   | 21   | 12   | 29     |
| QPR .....     | 14   | 8    | 2   | 4   | 23   | 14   | 26     |
| BARNLEY ..... | 14   | 8    | 1   | 5   | 23   | 14   | 25     |
| OLDHAM .....  | 14   | 7    | 4   | 3   | 22   | 16   | 25     |
| SHEFF WED ... | 14   | 7    | 2   | 5   | 14   | 16   | 23     |

SITTING PRETTY

WITH Cardiff doing them a favour at Watford, Luton Town stretched their lead at the top of the Second Division to five points this week. And promotion should be well within reach because they are now nine points clear of fourth place.

Watford are still in second place, but have now dropped five points out of the last six after being held to a scoreless draw at Vicarage Road by Cardiff.

Queens Park Rangers took the points in a crucial match at Hillsborough, to hold on to third place and send Sheffield Wednesday down two places to sixth.

Simon Stainrod, who supported Wednesday from the terraces as a boy, scored a hat-trick in a 3-1 win. It was their third away win and they have put together a run of seven league games without defeat.

Wednesday's slip let in Barnsley to take fourth place. Ian Banks hit a hat-trick in their 4-2 win at Rotherham, which was Barnsley's fifth victory in a row.

Oldham crept back into promotion contention with a 1-0 home win over Chelsea, who have now dropped seven places since going into the top three briefly in late September.

DEFENDER SENT OFF

Newcastle, who entertain the Town on Saturday, strolled to success at home to Charlton—it was the Londoners' second consecutive 1-4 hammering and defender Don McAllister got most of the blame. He was sent off late in the first half, when the score was 1-1.

Bolton, who come to Luton on Tuesday night, hit rock bottom when losing 0-2 at Shrewsbury. Orient climbed into 20th place with the day's most unbelievable result, winning 1-0 at Leicester, their first away win since the first day of the season.

Orient, who looked barely Third Division class in losing to the Town in early October, have picked up since the arrival of Ken Knighton as manager.

Since he became their third boss this season, after Jimmy Bloomfield and Paul West were eased out, Orient have lost only once in five outings.

Wrexham dropped one place to 20th when they lost 1-2 at Derby. Wrexham's Ian Edwards scored twice, one at each end, and Steve Buckley was Derby's marksman.

FIRST DIVISION IN ALL BUT FINISHING

SOME of the home supporters left Ewood Park kidding themselves that Second Division leaders Luton Town had been close to losing their proud record as the only unbeaten away side in the country.

"It could have gone either way," claimed one of the Lancashire pressmen, probably trying to cheer up Blackburn manager Bobby Saxton.

"Luton made a stack of chances and missed them, and if you had snatched a goal it might have been a different story."

Mr Saxton at least had the honesty to scotch that idea. "We might have sneaked a draw," he said. "But we never looked like winners. Luton deserved to win, even if it did take a penalty to give them their goal."

I share that view completely. In midfield, the Town's performance was top quality, the sort of stuff that would pose problems for a lot of First Division teams.

But the finishing was barely Third Division, with the luckless Steve White having a bit of a nightmare.

Milija Aleksic, back with his old club on loan from Spurs to deputise for the injured Jake Findlay, hardly had a serious save to make. Blackburn created only one clear chance, in the 76th minute, and Marshall Burke heard his name shouted and taken in vain all round after shooting over the bar from 12 yards.

Kirk Stephens had Noel Brotherston in his pocket and Mal Donaghy had another impressive outing. Mark Aizlewood rarely looked like getting caught out of position, and if Clive Goodyear looked a little raw at times the covering provided by his colleagues was first class.

Blackburn threatened danger but achieved nothing in the first 20 minutes, and from then on the Town were smoothly in control of affairs.

Ricky Hill and Lil Fuccillo competed for man of the match honours, with

Report by Brian Swain  
Pictures : Mark Richards

Brian Horton not far behind, and the regular service from midfield ought to have given the attack a field day.

Passes regularly sliced through an overworked Blackburn defence, which had to be re-shuffled at half-time when Glenn Keeley went off with a thigh muscle strain.

White must have broken a few Luton hearts with an infuriating mixture of talent—his hard work and anticipation, and sheer physical effort, helped to make Blackburn's defence look ready to be taken apart. But his finishing couldn't match the rest of his endeavours.

I remembered talking to Malcolm Macdonald as I watched White miss five reasonable chances—"Learning how to miss goals and still keep going for them is the important bit," he used to say.

In addition to White's collection of two shots wide, two well saved and one kicked off the line, David Moss hit the bar with a free kick, and Brian

Stein clipped the outside of a post with a fierce angled drive as the Town threatened to score half a dozen times.

My worry was that all too often when a team controls a game at both ends of the pitch and doesn't hit the target, the other side is always liable to get one on the break to make the result a mockery of the flow of the game.

But relief came for the Town and their travelling followers 11 minutes from time. Fuccillo threaded a pass into the path of Stein, and as the striker swept past a defender, goalkeeper Terry Gennoe advanced and dived clumsily to take Stein's legs instead of the ball.

"I hope White takes your penalties," said one of the Blackburn journalists as the whistle blew. The Pressbox chortled, then subsided as Moss hammered the winning goal, his fifth penalty success of the season.

It was, as Mr Saxton admitted, a victory that the Town deserved.

Match Details

BLACKBURN ROVERS 0 LUTON TOWN 1  
Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Aleksic; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Ingram, not used.

BLACKBURN: Gennoe; Branagan, Keeley (Comstive, 45 mins), Fazackerley, Rathbone; Stonehouse, Miller, Burke; Lowey, Garner, Brotherston.

THE GOAL: David Moss penalty, 79 minutes, after Gennoe pulled down Brian Stein.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved, six wide, two hit the woodwork; Blackburn four saved and eight off target. Corners: 4-4.

ATTENDANCE: 9,862—only two gates in the Second Division were smaller on a day clubs like Blackburn expected a boost with no First Division competition around.

ENTERTAINMENT: Plenty of sparkle from the Town's midfield and attacking build-up work, and more goals should have been scored to make it a match to remember.

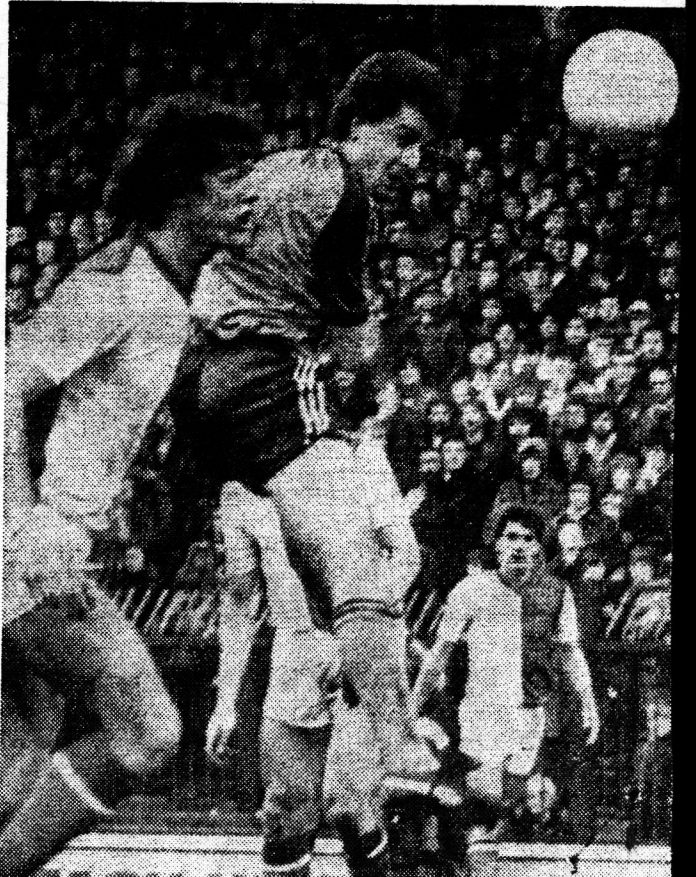
BOOKING: Lil Fuccillo for trying to take a free kick after the ref had told him to wait for the whistle.

REFEREE: Trelford Mills, Barnsley—no complaints about him, but one of his linesmen had a dreadful afternoon struggling to get the offside law right.

ANOTHER JINX KILLED: The Town's first victory at Blackburn since long before David Pleat became manager. David Moss's penalty was the first Town goal scored at Ewood Park since Billy Bingham's in 1959.



● NEARLY: Steve White dribbles round goalkeeper Terry Gennoe. A split second later his shot was cleared off the line by covering defender Derek Fazackerley.



● ONE THAT COUNTED . . . David Moss scores from the penalty. Right: ONE THAT DIDN'T . . . Steve White puts an early header wide after beating a defender to reach a cross by Moss.