

Town Match Verdict ★★★★★

SPORTS NEWS 1

SET FOR A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Gifts from rivals

FOR THE opening 15 minutes at Carrow Road, on Monday, Luton Town looked exactly what they are—next season's First Division side giving a shattering lesson to one from last season.

Norwich City were all but beaten by three goals in the first 14 minutes, yet the stunning effect of that start almost let the Canaries back in.

Their work done, the Town started to stroll around a little, and only great work by Jake Findlay in goal prevented Norwich's biggest crowd of the season from enjoying an unlikely revival.

For the last 30 minutes of the first half, and for the opening 20 minutes of the second, Norwich created more scoring chances.

They pulled one back just before the interval, and manager Ken Brown said: "We might easily have got a second, and that

**Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards**

would have made a real cup-tie of it."

Town manager David Pleat gave his men a roasting with the half-time tea, which must have sounded odd to players who had already proved their class.

They had pulled off the equivalent of running a couple of four-minute miles at the start of a marathon to win the race.

The blistering opening

saw the Town create three chances in the first 14 minutes, and score from each. Raddy Antic, in the side because Ricky Hill failed a fitness test, clipped in the first with a superb bending and dipping drive from 30 yards after seeing Chris Woods standing on his six-yard line.

That was in the third minute, and seven minutes later Antic put through the best pass I have seen this season to send Steve White clear. The striker rifled in his 14th goal of the season before either of the Norwich central defenders realised the danger.

Within four minutes Mal Donaghy won a tackle in midfield, and lofted another inch-perfect pass over the defence for Brian Stein to run through and crack home the Town's third.

Norwich fought hard to try to get back into the game, and the Town, going off the boil, had to defend in depth as the home side forced ten first-half corners.

It was mostly defensive practice, with Clive Goodyear and Donaghy heading long hopeful crosses away, and the Town looking promising on the break.

But Findlay had to earn his bonus with three vital saves in a ten-minute spell, one of them a blinder from John Deehan.

The Town ought to have scored more, with David Moss and White both unable to make the best use of good openings when



● **CELEBRATION:** Kirk Stephens congratulates Raddy Antic for giving the Town a perfect start with a goal in three minutes in their last match of 1981.

Norwich were caught stretched by counter-attacks.

Norwich piled on plenty of pressure without showing a lot of variety in attack, and Keith Bertschin missed the clearest chance of the whole game when he failed to make contact when he should have made a simple scoring header right in front of goal.

Two minutes before the interval Norwich hopes were raised higher when Deehan, on loan from West Brom, marked his league debut with a simple goal after a long free kick had been headed on into the penalty area.

Mark Aizlewood had to fight hard to stop Norwich making right wing attacks count as the home side raised their game at the start of the second half, but with Moss switching to the right wing the Town slowly regained control.

The midfield, however,

was not always as quick into the tackle as it might have been, with the result that the entertainment at both ends was non-stop, and fascinating to watch.

I had the feeling that the Town didn't deserve to lose, yet were in danger of being caught by a bad break, and certainly Norwich had all the luck that was going—Brian Horton and Moss both hit the bar with crashing drives which beat the goalkeeper.

White made the run of the match when he took the ball from deep inside his own half into the opposing penalty area. He exchanged passes with Stein to leave the Norwich defence in disarray, but then hit his low drive narrowly wide of the far post.

But by the last ten minutes the Norwich fire had burned out and their manager had to admit: "Luton looked a very good side. Both teams gave value for money, and I think Luton will be in the First Division next season."

WHILE victory at Norwich was the perfect present to end the old year for David Pleat and his team, rivals in the Second Division promotion race handed the Town gifts as well.

The Town had another enforced rest on Saturday because of the postponement of the Cambridge game, but challengers Oldham and Queens Park Rangers both managed to play — and both lost.

And on Monday Oldham did the Town another favour by dropping two home points, and the net result of the week's abbreviated fixture lists is that the Town go into 1982 as even hotter promotion favourites than West Ham were a year ago.

There was a pantomime touch about the Boxing Day events at Loftus Road. QPR recruited prisoners from Wormwood Scrubs to sweep snow off their plastic pitch, and then Chelsea stole the points.

Outplayed for most of the game, they won 2-0, and Mr Pleat watched it all in near disbelief.

"A complete freak," was his summing up as Rangers missed the chance to go joint second in front of 22,022 customers, their biggest attendance of the season.

The result at Oldham, where they have under-soil heating, was just as ludicrous for a different reason. Due to play at Blackburn, where the pitch was unfit, Oldham offered to use Boundary Park for the Boxing Day local Derby.

Blackburn agreed to switch fixtures, but the Football League decreed that the game must count as Blackburn's home

PROMOTION BATTLES

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	19	14	2	3	44	20	44
Oldham	21	10	7	4	32	23	37
Watford	18	10	4	4	28	20	34
QPR	20	10	3	7	27	19	33
Chelsea	20	9	5	6	28	27	32
Blackburn	21	8	7	6	25	20	31
Barnsley	19	9	3	7	30	21	30
Sheff Wed.	18	9	3	6	22	22	30

fixture. The Oldham "home" game later in the season will be played at Blackburn.

Second-placed Oldham came a cropper. They lost 3-0, yet the official league table calls that an away defeat, and officially Oldham are still the only club in the top three Divisions not to have lost at home this season.

A late penalty by Rodger Wyld saved them a point in a 1-1 draw with Leicester at Boundary Park on Monday, so although Oldham are still second their rivals all have games in hand.

Third placed Watford had no Christmas games at all, but now have three games in hand on Oldham, with a three-point gap to make up.

The best figure of the lot in the last league tables of 1981 is that the Town have a massive lead of 11 points over fourth placed QPR. They'll never have a better springboard for promotion

Match Details

NORWICH CITY 1, LUTON TOWN 3
Half-time: 1—3

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

NORWICH: Woods; Symonds, Walford, Watson, Downs; Barham, Muzinic (Mendham, 71 mins), McGuire, Bennett; Deehan, Bertschin.

THE GOALS: Raddy Antic, 3 mins, 30-yard bender into top corner; Steve White, 10 mins, shot from brilliant through-pass by Antic; Brian Stein, 14 mins, shot after over-the-top ball perfectly weighted and placed by Mal Donaghy; John Deehan for Norwich, 43 mins, after long free kick headed on.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town six saved, four off target, two hit the bar; Norwich 11 saved, six wide. Corners: 12-7 to Norwich.

ATTENDANCE: 19,348, easily Norwich's biggest of the season. Only St James's Park, Newcastle, has housed a bigger attendance for a Town game this season.

REFEREE: Martin Scott, Nottingham — did not have a perfect game, and his booking of Clive Goodyear for an alleged foul was highly dubious. It looked like a case of a ref stamping down for not getting to grips with earlier slight incidents.

ENTERTAINMENT: A lovely day out for the big following from Luton, with both sides contributing to a game which was much closer than the result suggests.



● **TOP SCORER:** Steve White lashes in the Town's second goal, his 14th of the season.



● **THREE UP:** Brian Stein goes round the goalkeeper for the Town's third goal at Norwich, their 44th in the Second Division this season.