

SPORTS NEWS 1

Half way towards a record

WITH THEIR season now at the half-way stage, Luton Town today are hotter promotion favourites than West Ham were at the same point last season. And they look certain to set a points record which other teams will chase for years.

The win over Leicester was the Town's 15th in 21 league fixtures, in which they have lost only three.

They have 48 points, and under the old system of two for a win and one for a draw they would have gathered 33. West Ham's halfway total last season was 31 from 13 victories and five draws.

The Town have games in hand on all their close rivals.

Oldham cling on to second place after a 1-1 home draw with Bolton, but games in hand could see Watford, Chelsea and QPR go above them.

Watford closed up to just a point below Oldham with a 2-1 victory at Rotherham. Rod Fern put the home side ahead in the second minute and a fluke goal by Ian Bolton brought an equaliser 13 minutes from time — he booted the ball to safety from the centre-circle and the wind turned the clearance into a shot which swirled into the net. John Barnes got the winner four minutes later.

Blackburn won at home to Cardiff and Chelsea moved up three places to fifth with a 3-1 home win over Shrewsbury.

But Barnsley overtook Chelsea on Tuesday night by winning 2-0 at Shrewsbury.

Sheffield Wednesday, who entertain the Town on Saturday, dropped two places by losing 1-3 at Derby, despite being a goal ahead at the interval.

FIGHT FOR PROMOTION

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	21	15	3	3	46	21	48
Oldham	25	11	9	5	35	26	42
Watford	22	12	5	5	39	26	41
Blackburn	25	10	8	7	30	24	38
Barnsley	22	11	4	7	35	22	37
Chelsea	22	10	6	6	33	30	36
QPR	22	10	5	7	28	20	35
Sheff. Wed.	21	10	4	7	27	28	34
Charlton	25	8	8	9	33	36	32

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2, LEICESTER CITY 1
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Judge; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Aizlewood; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo (Antic, 77 minutes); Stein, White, Moss.

LEICESTER: Wallington; Williams, May, O'Neill, Friar; Peake, Wilson, Ramsey (Melrose, 79, minutes); Lynex, Lineker, Young.

THE GOALS: Steve White for the Town, 13th minute, header from a cross by David Moss; Gary Lineker for Leicester, 52 minutes, beating Alan Judge and Kirk Stephens to the ball on the edge of the box; Mal Donaghy for the Town, 67 minutes, towering far post header from corner by Moss.

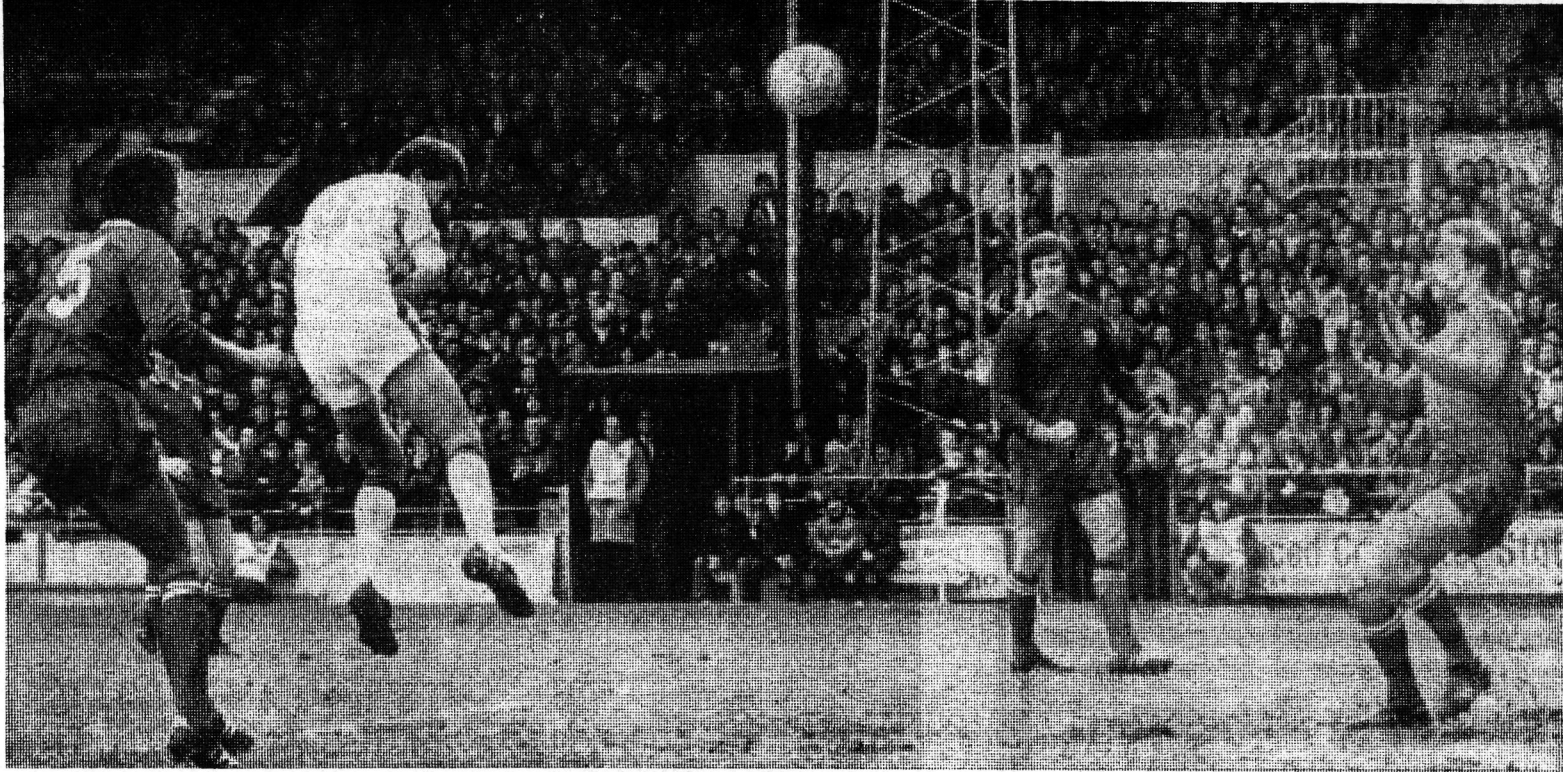
OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town 11 saved and 11 wide; Leicester four saved and six off target. Corners: 7-3 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 11,810 — highest for a league game at Kenilworth Road since Watford's visit in September, but a disappointment to Town boss David Pleat. Three clubs below the Town in the league had better gates — Barnsley, Crystal Palace and Newcastle.

ENTERTAINMENT: Tremendous value for money, especially in the first half when the Town's attacking football was the best they have produced for years except for finishing.

REFEREE: John Moules, Ongar — looked good, with Leicester's hard approach the only cause of problems. Bookings of Paul Ramsey and John O'Neill for fouls were justified.

Town Match Verdict ★★★★★



● GOING UP: Steve White heads his 15th goal of the season.

FIRST DIVISION IS SECOND BEST

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

THE CHORUS of praise for Luton Town started with beaten manager Jock Wallace and ended by being beamed to millions of armchair fans by Jimmy Hill and his Match of the Day team.

The style of the Town's victory over Leicester, much more complete than the score-line suggests, even pushed a First Division match out of top spot on TV.

The BBC had planned to make the First Division clash between Swansea and Manchester United its main match. But the producers took one look at the live pictures in the first half of the two games, and relegated the First Division to second place.

One of the technicians at Kenilworth Road, who watches most of his soccer in the First Division, explained: "We try to judge in advance which will be the main match. Then we look at the games, and look for the best entertainment and goals . . . If this is how Luton usually play you can't fail."

'Best we have met'

Mr Wallace, disgruntled by the way the Town had threatened to swamp Leicester, confined his comments to stating the obvious: "Luton are the best side we have played against this season. They'll win promotion."

In one of the shortest Press sessions any visiting manager has accomplished, his only other comment was to use a derisive word about his own men for their first-

half performance. He withdrew it immediately and stalked out in search of a stiff drink, saying he had enjoyed the second half.

The most satisfying feature of the Town's play was that the threat of a cup-tie hangover vanished within seconds of the kick-off.

There was a mixture of invention and determination as all 11 players hit top form. The quick passing, long and short alike, was breathtaking. Down the left Mark Aizlewood, Lil Fuccillo and David Moss all returned to the standards that make the side something special when the balance is right.

Brian Horton made tackling look easy and Leicester were in danger of being swamped as the Town surged forward for the whole of the first 45 minutes.

They put an extra man on Ricky Hill and suffered for it, because holes appeared elsewhere, and one match statistic sums up the Town's first-half domination—they scored once, had nine efforts saved or blocked, and had another eight shots or headers at goal but off target.

Easy for the deputy

Leicester's sum total of first-half attacking efforts was one weak 20-yard shot easily saved and two efforts wide, giving stand-in goalkeeper Alan Judge an easy half-game.

Mal Donaghy and Clive Goodyear blocked everything down the middle, and Kirk Stephens became an extra attacker as the Leicester defence rocked. Brian Stein and Steve White looked sharp on and off the ball, and for a long time it looked like men against boys.

There was one worry at half-time—the Town had been so brilliant in everything but finishing that Leicester surely had to compete better after the break, and with only one goal scored the game had not been put beyond their reach.

Mark Wallington had been forced to make a vital flying save in the second minute when Stein nearly surprised him with a shot on the turn, but had been left exposed and helpless when White headed his 15th goal of the season in the 13th minute.

It was a goal of perfection in build-up and finish. Fuccillo's pass from midfield opened up half the Leicester defence, and Moss destroyed the other half with a run down the wing, beating his man and crossing accurately to make White's header a formality. And the whole move was carried through in rapid time, giving defenders no chance to organise themselves until it was too late.

As Town boss David Pleat commented, Leicester could easily have been three down at the break. Aizlewood, Hill and White all went close, and Wallington made another superb save to stop Tommy Williams turning a cross by Hill into his own net.

Brute strength . . .

Leicester stiffened up their tackling in the second half, apparently believing that physical power and brute strength was their only hope of combating superior skill and talent.

They also produced some telling long ball passes into the penalty area, teasing Judge and testing him and his defenders. Not surprisingly mutual understanding was not always apparent, and Judge and Stephens were both going for the same ball on the edge of the area when Gary Lineker snatched an equaliser in the 52nd minute after Steve Lynex had flicked on a through-ball by Ian Wilson.

Spoiling tactics threatened to rob the Town of a win they deserved, but in the 67th minute Larry May's back pass gave the Town their seventh corner of the game and Donaghy charged up on the far post to head his seventh goal of the season from Moss's flag kick.

It was no less than the Town deserved, although they still had one late scare: a cross by substitute Jim Melrose was met with a perfect header by Alan Young. He thought he had equalised and punched the air in frustration as Judge launched himself skywards to tip the ball over the bar with the best save of the match.



● AIRBORNE ASSAULT: Town skipper Brian Horton launches himself into the attack as Leicester come under pressure. This was the fourth shot in one raid blocked by the visiting defence, although the effort was nullified because Brian Stein, on the right, was offside.