

Verdict on the Town's week ★★★★★

SPORTS
NEWS 1DULL ORIENT
PAY THE
PENALTY

IT TOOK THE TOWN THREE days to resume normal service this week. After a six-month reign as top dogs in the Second Division was interrupted by a draw at Derby, their first win in six attempts at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday night saw them confirmed as championship favourites.

But struggling Orient gave us a foretaste of what we might expect for the rest of the season.

Fighting the threat of relegation, the limit of their ambition was a 0-0 draw.

And for more than an hour their stubborn defensive display kept the Town at arm's length, with frustration and nervousness creeping around the stands.

It needed a penalty to break the deadlock before the Town wrapped up their third double of the season.

Disgruntled Orient boss Ken Knighton, who once looked like performing miracles when he joined the Londoners, took the easy way out to explain

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

why his side are once more looking relegation fodder.

He appeared to believe that the result was all down to referee Trevor Spencer. Knighton shared the view of the Orient defence that it was no penalty when Mervyn Day went down at Brian Stein's feet in the 62nd minute.

Stein had tricked his way past two men, and tried to take on the goalkeeper as well after receiving

ing a sharp pass from Kirk Stephens.

It looked a penalty to me, but out of more than 20 neutral observers in the Pressbox, opinion was just about equally divided.

The ref had no doubts, and David Moss lashed the penalty high into the net for the 11th time this season, and that was just about the end of Orient.

They had shown no inclination to open the game up and go forward. Jake Findlay was all but redundant, and the corner count gives a fair reflection of the run of play—ten to the Town and not one to Orient.

Their followers had one quality to admire—a stubborn and well-organised defence which kept the Town out for the first hour.

Colin Foster gave Steve White no room at all, and at one stage voices in the crowd were clamouring for the introduction of sub Billy Jennings to be given a chance against his old mates.

Richard Money was an instant hit on his home debut, with an attacking edge on a sound defensive display which often took him further forward than Moss.

Brian Horton bottled up the isolated midfield threat from Orient, and Ricky Hill and Wayne Turner both made splendid contributions to the Town's domination in that area.

Yet for all their pressure the Town had created little

● **OPENER:** David Moss hits his 11th penalty goal of the season to break the deadlock against defence-minded Orient at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday.

positive danger in the Orient penalty area. Day had to make only two real saves in the first hour, tipping shots from Stein and Moss round the post.

Stein's sparkle warmed up a bitterly cold night, and it was fitting that his skill and determination should produce the all-important first goal.

The second was an overdue gem from Hill to celebrate his call-up for England under-21 duty next week. He looked sharper than he has done in the past couple of weeks, and started and finished the move which ended Orient's defiance in the 71st minute.

White made his best contribution on a night when little went right for him by laying on the return pass for Hill to crack in the second goal.

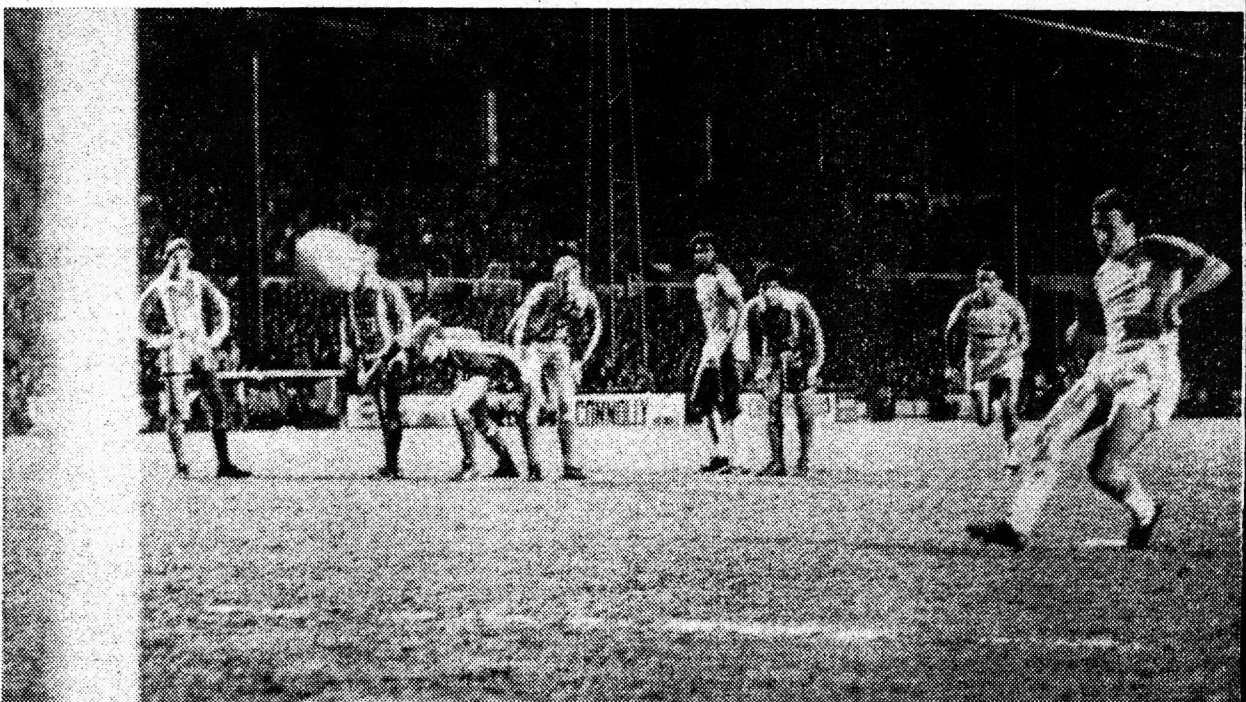
Orient boss Knighton complained bitterly about the penalty award which he claimed robbed his side of a much-needed point. Except for that mistake by the ref, he suggested, Luton had no chance of scoring.

Perhaps so. But Town manager David Pleat underlined the other point that escaped Mr Knighton: "We deserved to win, and any controversy about the penalty should not outshine what went on. There was only one side that looked like scoring, or winning."

And he took extra pleasure from the fact that his

re-shaped defence, with a new man introduced, had kept its second consecutive clean sheet after leaking six goals in the previous two outings.

An even greater satisfaction for Town followers is to look again at today's league table, with the knowledge that seven of the remaining 11 league games are at home.



● **CONTROVERSY:** Mervyn Day slides in with the attempted block which brought down Brian Stein and earned the Town the penalty.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2, ORIENT 0

Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Turner; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Jennings, not used.

ORIENT: Day; Banjo; Foster, Gray, Peach; Fisher, Godfrey, Silkman, Sussex; Houchen, Moores (Hughton, 71 mins).

THE GOALS: David Moss, 11th penalty of the season, 62 mins, after Mervyn Day brought down Brian Stein, and disputed the decision; Ricky Hill, 71 minutes, shot after taking return pass from Steve White.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town ten saved and five off target; Orient one blocked and two well wide. Corners 10-0 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 9,716—the team is a lot nearer First Division standard than its support.

REFEREE: Trevor Spencer, Salisbury. Made a few mistakes, and Orient thought he made his biggest when he gave the Town the penalty that broke the deadlock.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not the best we have seen, but highly enjoyable for the final 15 minutes.

BRIGHTSPOT: Victory put the Town back on top of the Second Division after a three-day break. Watford won't mind being second.

Easy point
satisfies

DERBY COUNTY 0, LUTON TOWN 0

TAKING NO CHANCES—unfortunately in both senses of the phrase—the Town almost strolled through Saturday's draw at the Baseball Ground.

Knowing that "Win at home and draw away" is still the formula to take the Second Division title, manager David Pleat was happy enough to avoid defeat, particularly in view of the number of home games to follow.

But I had the feeling that the extra two points might easily have been brought home if the Town had chosen to be just a little more adventurous.

They made Derby look second best in every department, with the defence and midfield in particular well on top of their opponents.

But Brian Stein was the only Town attacker who looked likely to make a breakthrough, and he was unlucky with a couple of efforts, one headed off the line by Steve Buckley and the other blocked by the goalkeeper in a crowded penalty area.

Derby showed considerable respect for the Town's reputation, yet in a match where most of the shooting had to be at long range Jake Findlay had the most serious save to make, with a one-handed flyer to keep out a shot by Kevin Wilson.

The highlights of a Town performance which was often delightful to watch save for the lack of finishing power were the impressive displays by Richard Money at left-back and Wayne Turner on the left side of midfield.

Match details

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Turner; Stein, White, Moss. Sub: Antic, not used.

DERBY: Banovic; Barton, Sheridan, McAlle, Buckley; Skivington, Attley, Emson, George; Wilson, Swindlehurst. Sub: Hester, not used.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and six wide; Derby six saved and two off target. Corners: 9-6 to Derby.

ATTENDANCE: 15,836. Derby's second highest of the season, boosted by the second home debut of Charlie George.

REFEREE: Derek Webb, Sale.

ENTERTAINMENT: Fair value for money but the customers really wanted to see a goal or two.

BLACKSPOT: Two dropped points enabled Watford to have a brief taste of the glow of being top of the Second Division for the first time in their history.



● **CLINCHER:** Mervyn Day is going the wrong way as Ricky Hill hits the Town's second goal.