

SPORTS
NEWS 1

Verdict on the Town's week ★★☆☆

NEARLY THERE!



● EQUALISER: Raddy Antic gets inside two would-be markers to score the Town's first goal against Chelsea.



● GOING UP: Mal Donaghy, second from the left, watches his header sail towards the Chelsea net to save a point for the Town.

But Chelsea almost end proud record

THE PAYING CUSTOMERS were the winners at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday as Luton Town's biggest league attendance of the season watched a fascinating contest in which both sides lost two points.

Chelsea provided a fascinating contrast in style and went close to ending the Town's 14-match unbeaten home run in the Second Division.

A thundering header by Mal Donaghy 14 minutes from time rescued a point for the Town.

Both managers were satisfied with the point which maintained two useful runs—it was Chelsea's sixth game without defeat.

But the satisfaction was so nearly a one-way feeling, because in soccer skills Chelsea were second best, yet could so easily have pinched a victory.

They used the classic tactic of teams who know they need to pull out something special against a top quality side. They organised and marshalled their defence, marked tightly in midfield when danger threatened, and hoped for

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

the odd lucky break to go their way in attack.

With David Moss still out of action through injury, the Town rarely looked like stretching Chelsea on the flanks, with the result that too many attacks were predictable.

They drew their battle line a yard outside the penalty area, defended in strength, and relied on 17-year-old goalkeeper Steve Francis to keep them afloat when the Town did get through.

FLYING SAVE

He started with a flying first-minute save from Brian Stein, and Chelsea went home happy with the performance of an injury-hit rearguard.

Striker Colin Lee played alongside Micky Nutton, and the pair made a fair job of holding Stein and Steve White.

Raddy Antic, hovering just behind the two front runners, became the key to the Town's attacking hopes, but in general the system looked less effective than a traditional three-man attack with at least one playing wide and getting to the by-line occasionally.

Most of the action was in the Chelsea half, and the visitors had produced only one long-range shot, easily saved by Jake Findlay, before their first real attack, in the 34th minute, produced a shock goal.

Alan Mayes underlined what the Town were missing by going down the left wing, bamboozling Mal Donaghy on the way, and firing in a hard cross.

Mike Fillery met it, and although Findlay blocked his scoring attempt the ball bobbed up kindly for Clive Walker to net with a close-range header.

It turned out to be the only real danger Walker was to pose all night, and Clive Goodyear drew warm praise from his manager later for another solid defensive performance.

Chelsea were forced back on defence for long periods, and the ever-willing run-

ning of White brought an equaliser the Town deserved just before the interval. Brian Horton, the Town's outstanding player again, started the move and White veered towards the left wing before laying the ball off for Antic to hit a low shot into the net.

The Yugoslav had put another reasonable chance wide a few minutes earlier, and as the Town continued to attack at the start of the second half a blinding save by Francis denied Antic a second goal.

It seemed that Chelsea had to crack, yet an astonishing goal in the 61st minute made a mockery of the run of play.

Fillery tried a shot from 25 yards, and Findlay stood and watched as the ball swerved and dipped into the net.

I marked it down as a goalkeeping error, but Mr Pleat disagreed and gave Fillery credit for producing a fantastic shot.

Chelsea, who failed to win a single corner, could hardly complain when the Town's ever-increasing attacking pressure finally brought the reward it deserved.

Ricky Hill, like several Town players not quite at his best, forced Francis to a finger-tip save and Stein chipped a clever shot inches over the bar before the second equaliser arrived in the 76th minute.

Donaghy, arriving unmarked with perfect timing, met a deep corner by Stein with a header which was too much even for the excellent Francis.

And the disappointment of not winning was for most of us balanced by the relief at not losing. And Chelsea boss John Neal shares the view that the Town are nearly safe in the promotion race.

The best fact of all is that the 74 points reached with the draw equate to 55 under the old system of two for a win and one for a draw. And in the last ten years that has been ample for promotion eight times. It will be again this year.

Chelsea Details

LUTON TOWN 2. CHELSEA 2

Half-time 1-1

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

CHELSEA: Francis; Locks, Nutton, Lee, Hutchings; Pates, Britton, Chivers, Fillery; Walker, Mayes. Sub: Watkins, not used.

THE GOALS: Clive Walker for Chelsea, 34 minutes, close range header after Jake Findlay blocked Fillery's shot; Raddy Antic for the Town, 44 minutes, shot from opening made by Brian Horton and Steve White; Mike Fillery for Chelsea, 61 minutes, 25-yard bender and dipper deceiving Findlay; Mal Donaghy for the Town, 76 minutes, header from Stein's corner.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved and seven wide; Chelsea four saved and two wide. Corners: 8-0 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 16,185, highest league gate of the season so far, but boosted by big following from Chelsea.

REFEREE: Alex Hamil, Wolverhampton—over-fussy occasionally, but had a good game.

ENTERTAINMENT: Another to keep the fans on tenterhooks right to the final whistle. Genuine value for money even if pace and power sometimes replaced the cultured composed soccer we have got used to.

One to stir the memory

MORE THAN 30 years ago Luton Town met Newcastle at Kenilworth Road and came back from three down at half-time to win 4-3. It's still well remembered by thousands who were there. And well past the year 2000 there will be men in Luton who will easily recall Saturday's incredible action replay.

They'll tell their sons and grandsons that the ground buzzed with an unbelievable atmosphere, as a brilliant centre-forward saved the day in the last half-hour with a hat-trick to earn the points that turned out to be the three that ensured promotion.

STORMING FINISH

They might remember being worried stiff at Luton Town, weakened by the absence of regular players, lost their normal rhythm, but discovered deep reserves of passion and commitment to beat Newcastle in a storming finish.

One or two old men might even confess that they were so carried away they invaded the pitch at the end to carry Brian Stein off the field like a conquering hero.

He completed the second hat-trick of his Luton Town career with a pair of penalties, which he took because David Moss was out of the side through injury. Ricky Hill's influence in the last half-hour was a far bigger drawback, yet the reorganised team, with a makeshift 4-4-2 formation, triumphed against all the odds.

Failure looked likely when Newcastle, finding well, and inventive on the break, moved into a 2-0 lead in the 57th minute.

Richard Money had been beaten as Peter Wright crossed for David Mills to score a low shot in the 23rd minute, and the

LUTON TOWN 3
NEWCASTLE 2

second goal came when Clive Goodyear tripped Mills. John Trewick scored from the penalty.

Luckily for the Town the visitors decided to change tactics. They tried to stifle the game, with negative defensive tactics and time-wasting so blatant that it brought bookings for goalkeeper Kevin Carr and midfielder Ken Wharton.

Newcastle had been forced to reorganise in the tenth minute when Dave Barton went off injured, but they settled into a useful-looking routine much quicker than the Town did.

Stein and Steve White struggled for a long time, with not enough service and support, in a Town line-up with a four-man midfield—Raddy Antic, Brian Horton, Lil Fuccillo and Wayne Turner.

Newcastle's decision to defend their lead was ill-timed, leaving the Town half an hour to repair the damage. The visitors simply gave up the initiative, and the Town had the power—and the luck—to punish them for it.

Six minutes after Newcastle's second goal Stein put his side back in with a chance after Mal Donaghy and White had given him half an opening. Stein took the ball into the penalty area, around the goalkeeper, and scored with the coolness of a class player.

Town players and supporters realised that the game could be won after all, and the surge of confidence helped to complete Newcastle's misery.

White smashed a shot against the bar, and Antic did the same soon afterwards, but if luck was against them on those occasions, the

referee, Alan Seville, helped to redress matters in a memorable final nine minutes.

In a wild skirmish as Newcastle defended desperately, free kicks might have been given either way, but Mr Seville ruled that Mick Martin, the emergency centre-half, had fouled Horton.

Stein obliged from the spot after Mills had been booked for showing dissent at a decision that looked harsh.

With five minutes to go Stein tried to pull the ball back from the by-line, and Martin, apparently taking action to stop the ball hitting his face, was penalised for hands when the ball hit him.

Stein miraculously kept cool in the cauldron of near-hysteria to hit the winner. His penalties were both struck almost at the centre of the net, with goalkeeper Kevin Carr obligingly diving away from them. It was tough luck on Carr, but justice on a Newcastle side that decided to stop playing football for the last half-hour.

Bad temper crept in, spilling over into a scuffle and fisticuffs in the tunnel at the end between Donaghy and Mills, for which the Newcastle player was later disciplined by his club.

MATCH DETAILS

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

NEWCASTLE: Carr; Brownlie, Barton (Wharton, 10 mins); Haddock, Saunders; Trewick, Martin, Cartwright; Mills, Varadi, Waddle.

THE GOALS: Mills for Newcastle, 23 mins; Trewick penalty, for Newcastle, 57 mins; Brian Stein hat-trick for the Town, 63 minutes and two penalties, 81 and 85 mins.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved, ten off target and two hit the bar; Newcastle two saved and five wide. Corners: 6-3 to the Town.

REFEREE: Alan Seville, Birmingham.

ENTERTAINMENT: Memorable rousing stuff for the last half-hour. We must be glad to forget the rest because the result and its significance outweighed just about every other feeling for Town supporters.