

NEARLY THERE!

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 at 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.



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

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: Wilkins, 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.