

SPORTS NEWS 1

Town season verdict ★★★★★

AFTER DRAWING at home to Barnsley and then winning at Cardiff on Monday night, Luton Town underlined their domination of the Second Division this week. They finished eight points clear of the field, and a massive 18 points ahead of fourth place.

	HOME						AWAY						
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	
Luton Town	42	16	3	2	48	19	9	10	2	38	27	88	
Watford	42	13	6	2	46	16	10	5	6	30	26	80	
Norwich	42	14	3	4	41	19	8	2	11	23	31	71	
Sheff Wed	42	10	8	3	31	23	10	2	9	24	28	70	

CLASS IS THE TOP AND BOTTOM OF IT

A LITTLE soccer justice was done at Ninian Park on Monday as the Town completed their championship season with a victory which was far more emphatic than the 3-2 score-line suggests.

Sweet revenge for the Town against one of only four league teams to beat them in the league this season sent Cardiff tumbling into the Third Division after seven years teetering on the brink.

And it was a well-deserved ambition achieved for David Pleat, who had failed to see a Luton victory on each of his previous visits as manager to the Welsh capital.

In the end I could feel a little sympathy for Cardiff. They're not much of a side, yet they found the spirit to fight back when their cause was lost, scoring twice in the last seven minutes.

My memory of the far too well to Cardiff will be of the hour I spent after the game in their supporters' club. Grown men, as well as women and youngsters, were weeping.

They had plenty to cry about, and were remembering the missed chances that cost their team so dear. They talked about two headers by Gary Stevens which clipped the top of Jake Findlay's bar in the second half, and of a vital early save the goalkeeper made when Mal Donaghy missed a clear-

ance and left Dave Bennett in the clear.

And perhaps they should also weep over two crucial areas in which the Town showed their superiority: in tactical planning and in the brilliance of Brian Stein.

Cardiff played with frantic desperation, but were over-eager when they had sight of goal. Their nerves showed, and the Town, building on steady defence, gradually asserted control.

Raddy Antic was brought back at the expense of Lil Fuccillo, and he and Ricky Hill joined Brian Horton in a midfield which defended well when it had to, and set up some stunning breaks to launch counter-attacks.

If Mr Pleat's planning

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

and preparations were exactly right, Cardiff boss Len Ashurst made his biggest mistake before kick-off.

He chose to play four men in midfield and only two in attack, and did not put that right until the 55th minute when striker Peter Kitchen went on as sub to replace a midfielder.

The clash of styles produced a fascinating contest, and the final score could well have been something like 7-4 to the Town.

Stein was every inch a First Division player, prepared to work in defence when the pressure was on, and devastating with his finishing as he scored the Town's first and third goals to take his tally to 21 and become the club's leading scorer for the second consecutive year.

Yet he missed two other clear chances, shooting wide from an opening made by David Moss and then hitting the bar from three yards when goalkeeper Ron Healey was hopelessly out of position.

Antic and Steve White laid on Stein's opener in the 22nd minute. Donaghy ghosted upfield to head the Town's second in the 72nd minute from a Moss free kick, and eight minutes later Stein turned two defenders inside out before making it 3-0.

Cardiff's biggest league

gate of the season was in two camps at this stage—half heading out of the ground looking as though they were contemplating a plunge into the River Taff and the other half desperately trying to persuade their fading heroes that miracles could still be achieved.

They very nearly were. Veteran Kitchen, trying to make an impression after being given a free transfer earlier in the day, pulled one back in the 83rd minute and then gave Tarki Micallef an opening to make it 3-2 with three minutes to go.

But at that stage it was of little importance. The Town's First Division class had already made its presence felt.

DETAILS

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Antic, Horton; Stein, White, Moss (Small, 80 mins.).

CARDIFF: Healey; Jones, Pontin, Mullen, Henderson; Micallef, Grapes (Kitchen, 55 mins), Gary Bennett, Gilbert; Stevens, Dave Bennett.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein, 22 and 81 minutes, Mal Donaghy 72 minutes; Peter Kitchen 83 minutes and Tarki Micallef 87 minutes for Cardiff.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town nine saved, six wide, one hit the bar. Cardiff five saved, nine wide, two hit the bar. Corners: 12-4 to Cardiff.

ATTENDANCE: 10,277, Cardiff's best league gate of the season.

REFEREE: Alan Robinson, Watlington.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good to watch for the Town's loyal following, but agony for the home fans.



● IT'S OURS: Skipper Brian Horton and manager David Pleat hold the Second Division championship cup aloft at Kenilworth Road. Chief coach David Coates and Lil Fuccillo are on the right, with Jake Findlay showing a title-winning smile

Tykes nearly spoil the party

LUTON TOWN 1, BARNESLEY 1

NO-NONSENSE tackling and hard graft by Barnesley went within three minutes of spoiling the Town's championship afternoon at Kenilworth Road.

Norman Hunter's team politely applauded the Town onto the pitch before the kick-off, but then got stuck in to play as though they really needed a win bonus.

Their defence was superb, their midfield worked like men afraid of the sack

if they were seen slacking, and the aerial threat of Trevor Aylott made their basic ploy of high balls into the penalty area a regular threat.

The Town, by contrast, wandered through the first half looking jaded and short of commitment. In view of the season's outstanding success perhaps all their friends would allow them one lapse when it didn't matter.

But luckily for the fans, Barnesley went into the lead in the 50th minute, and that was the spark the Town needed to get back into the game.

Barnsley had created and missed the better chances before they scored from a penalty. Referee John Martin had a poor game, but was quite right to point to the spot when Alan Birch launched a one-man attack down the right wing and cut into the area, where he was pulled down by Jake

Findlay.

Mr Martin was almost too quick with the whistle because the ball ran free from the foul and Glyn Filey netted a split second after the ref signalled the penalty.

Birch converted from the spot, and at long last the Town started to win control of midfield and put more consistent pressure on the Barnesley goal.

Steve White flicked a powerful header from David Moss's cross straight at Bobby Horn. A few minutes later the striker bundled goalkeeper and ball into the net after Lil Fuccillo's lob had been caught under the bar. The ref was right again when he disallowed that effort.

Barnsley boss Hunter thought his team did enough to become the first to complete a double, but conceded that the equalising goal from Brian Stein in the 87th minute was

something special.

Stein attacked down the inside right position, taking a pass from Kirk Stephens, and drifting wide of his marker before hurling himself into a ferocious shot.

Stein was airborne as he hit the ball from the edge of the penalty area with stunning force into the far corner of the net. "A marvellous strike," said the envious Hunter, whose own forward star, Aylott, is about to leave Oakwell at the end of his contract.

DETAILS

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo (Antic, 66 mins.); Stein, White, Moss.

BARNESLEY: Horn; Law, McCarthy, Evans, Chambers; Riley, Banks, McHale; Walker, Aylott, Birch. Sub: Mann, not used.

THE GOALS: Alan Birch penalty, 50 minutes, after he had been rugby-tackled by Jake Findlay; Brian Stein, 87 minutes, thundering 18-yard drive.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and seven off target. Barnesley five saved and five wide. Corners: 6-5 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 14,463. **REFEREE:** John Martin, Hampshire.

ENTERTAINMENT: The pre-match presentation of the Second Division championship medals was more enjoyable than the first 60 minutes of the game.



● PURE MAGIC: Brian Stein in mid-air as he hit the Town's goal against Barnsley



● NO GOAL: Steve White turns in hope, but his effort against Barnsley was ruled out for a foul on the goalkeeper.