

TOWN PARTY BECOMES A WAKE FOR CARDIFF

81/82

ERIC HARRIS WITH LUTON

CARDIFF: Healey, Jones, Henderson, Pontin, Micallef, Mullen, Grapes (Kitchen), Gilbert, Bennett (G.), Stevens, Bennett (D.).

LUTON: Findlay, Stephens, Money, Horton, Goodyear, Donaghy, Hill, Stein, White, Antic, Moss (Small).

ATTENDANCE: 10,277. **REFEREE:** A. Robinson (Hampshire). **GOALS:** Stein (23, 81), Donaghy (72), Kitchen (82), Micallef (87).

As far as skill was concerned, there was only one footballing side in the match and Brian Stein is today kicking himself for not scoring another three goals to add to the two recorded at Ninian Park last night.

Late goals

The Top Hatters were devastating in attack and extremely thorough in defence. Frantic Cardiff threw everything at them but, apart from those two late goals, there was never any indication they would escape the drop.

Cardiff supporters gave the Town a tremendous welcome as champions — but, at the end, they had little to enthuse over.

Luton did a thorough demolition job and, once they went two up, there was rarely any indication that the home team were going to stay in the Second Division.

It was an easy victory although the Welshmen

often threatened to snatch more than two goals. But keeper Jake Findlay and his defensive partners ensured there would be no party for Cardiff.

Some of the Town's passing was devastating and their defensive ability in the box was ample proof of their rightful title of champions.

And with only 14 minutes gone when Mal Donaghy made a rare mistake Luton escaped for the first time when Dave Bennett's shot was beaten out by Findlay with an effort which could easily have put Cardiff in front.

Then, six minutes later Gary Bennett hit the side netting after Richard Money also made an uncharacteristic error.

Cardiff's non-stop approach work provided good value for their supporters but they had little chance of making any impression against a solid defence.

When Luton went in

front in the 23rd minute that was the beginning of the end for City. David Moss created the opening with a shrewd pass to Steve White whose superb square ball found Stein.

Tim Gilbert failed to check his progress and Luton's leading scorer rammed the ball into the net to give the Hatters a deserved lead.

A minute later, Stein made the first of his mistakes when he allowed Ron Healey to make a point blank save from his close range shot before the keeper made another excellent stop from White's header.

Missed

There was only a minute of the first half left when Stein missed another of the proverbial sitters when Healey saved his ferocious drive.

The second half continued in the same pattern when Stephens sliced his effort wide and then saw a header hit the bar and bounce over.

Stein's amazing bad luck continued when he capitalised on White's cross to hit the underside of the bar. The ball bounced down and out and Cardiff were able to breath again.

Findlay made another important save with another point blank stop

from Steven's header but, after 72 minutes, the Town deservedly increased their lead.

It came from Moss's free kick, intelligently chipped over the defensive wall which Mal Donaghy met perfectly to head firmly past Healey.

Eight minutes later, Stein showed his own fury when he sliced his short range shot wide after taking advantage of another cross from Moss.

But 60 seconds later, he recorded his 22nd goal of the season when he superbly controlled the ball, from Ricky Hill's pass, to give Luton their third goal.

Cardiff kept fighting and, within a minute, pulled one back when substitute Peter Kitchen poked in a close-range shot through a forest of Luton legs.

And, with three minutes left, Tarki Micallef converted another close-range effort to give the Cardiff fans some measure of hope.

But it was all in vain because there was never any doubt that Cardiff were being despatched into the Third Division.

The wake had been completed and the champions fully deserved the standing ovation from their small army of fans at the end.



JAKE FINDLAY

It wasn't so much a defeat for Cardiff. It was a funeral. All their frantic attacking efforts were easily contained although, to their credit, they hit back with two goals in the last eight minutes.

Smile

Luton's victory was achieved with simplicity to help Bolton maintain their Second Division status. But Pleat could easily have been forgiven for wearing a broad smile on the way back from South Wales.

There was a carnival atmosphere on Luton's luxury coach and the players fully deserved their party which was not completed until the early hours of this morning.

Ashurst, understandably did not talk to the Press after the game. Neither did Pleat — his smile said it all as the Town finished the season with only four away defeats to win the championship by eight points.

It is a remarkable achievement and last night's result was more important because Luton went out to win with professional dedication to ensure that Cardiff's annual Houdini act was not successful.



Luton's Mal Donaghy gets up to score the second goal at Ninian Park