

FOREST BOSS TWIGS IT

FOR A MANAGER who had just seen his team lose its third consecutive game, David Pleat was remarkably cheerful about the Town's second home defeat of the season.

I thought Nottingham Forest had done a cool professional job to beat the Town—doing just enough but not much more. Mr Pleat said: "I'm disappointed with the result, but don't let the score hide the good things."

"I was not unhappy about our general performance. There were times when we played better than we did against Brighton and Notts County, and if we continue to play like that we shall be OK."

I worry that First Division managers have worked out how to stop the Town's goal-scoring machine clicking into gear. After the early season rush we have now seen five hours of soccer played without a Town goal scored.

The manager and his chief coach, David Coates, counter that by saying that the time to worry is when you aren't making chances.

Forest's defence was not exactly watertight at Kenilworth Road—but the potential leaks always seemed to be plugged by a desperate lunge, a lucky deflection or a determined blocking tackle.

Brian Clough's pre-match planning was simple and effective: when the Town attacked, Forest filled their penalty area with bodies. Several times all 10 red shirts were packing their own box, and the only way through would be via a lucky break or with an inspired piece of play.

I thought Forest had the edge in the first half, with their midfield working effectively and using the ball well to get Garry Birtles and Ian Wallace on the attack.

In a re-shuffled Town defence Mal Donaghy moved to right-back, with Kirk Stevens dropped again. He was superb in cutting out the dangers from John Robertson, the winger who tore Stevens apart in a friendly at Forest early this year.

Wayne Turner got through an amazing amount of work at left-back, and Clive Goodyear and Richard Money in the centre of defence came

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

within 30 seconds of defying everything Forest produced in the first half.

At the other end the towering Willie Young and the composed veteran Colin Todd kept close to Brian Stein and Paul Walsh. Billy Kellock, making his debut in midfield, tried a couple of long-range shots which went wide. He was willing enough to work and try to create moves, and perhaps we expect too much when we see Ricky Hill in flowing form.

He looked the most

likely Town player to make holes in Forest's deep defence, and refused to stay out of the game even after collecting a facial cut which needed six stitches.

David Moss and Brian Horton both threatened to do great things, without being able to deliver the decisive thrust and if Clough's tactics were a little safety-conscious in their approach, he had the players able to make them work.

A spreading save denied Stein a first-minute goal after a neat quick move by Horton and Moss and another escape came in the 15th minute when Moss got offside on the far post after Kellock had pressured the goalkeeper into missing a cross by Hill. The shot went into the side netting anyway.

Jake Findlay was sharp enough to tip a cross-shot by Robertson over the bar and Birtles put a reasonable chance wide, while Van-Breukelen had trouble in keeping out a header by Hill after neat ball control by Walsh and Stein.

It needed only one goal for Forest to be forced to change tactics, but they struck the first important blow just before the interval. Ian Bowyer, surging through midfield, hammered a 25-yard drive past Findlay and on to the bar. Birtles got to the rebound first, laid off a short pass and Wallace took the chance on the volley.

Both sides made and missed chances in the second half, and the Town looked ready to take com-



● NOT THIS TIME: David Moss shoots wide in an early Town attack . . .

mand when they were caught on the break as the pace increased.

An attack was cleared to Birtles on the right wing, and he sent a superb pass across the full width of the pitch to Robertson on the left. Donaghy, who had roared up and down the flank to defend and attack in turn, was caught out of position and as the Town tried to get back to cover the cross they expected, Robertson knocked a short pass back to Bryn Gunn.

The full-back had made a quick forward run and cracked a tremendous drive across and beyond Findlay into the net from about 25 yards.

It was a goal to admire, despite going into the wrong net, and I felt that Forest were not going to lose after that.

The Town kept trying to find a way through, and might have succeeded against many teams. But Hill's header from Moss's centre produced another good save and in two late attacks Walsh was foiled.

He went through on a twisting and turning run and shot just wide, with the goalkeeper beaten, then got on to the end of another header by Hill to try to find a way through a packed goal area. He tricked the goalkeeper, made a little space, but saw the shot blocked.

It might have been bad luck. But there were 11 Forest players in the penalty area at the time. I just hope Arsenal don't do the same on Saturday. I suspect they will, unless the Town can score first.



● . . . NOR THIS: Brian Stein tries to get past Willie Young

Fiftieth goal...but it's

AFTER RISING to eighth place in the First Division a month ago when they won at Birmingham, Luton Town are now 16th in the table, only one point above the crucial third from bottom spot.

Things are so tight that one victory can push a team three or four places up the table.

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Goals are worth an extra point to the Town over most close rivals, although the two Forest scored at Kenilworth Road mean that the goal difference is now zero. Fans who have seen all 12 Town games this season in the league have had 25 goals to enjoy, and 25 to deplore. Every other team in the bottom ten, except Ipswich, has a minus goals difference figure.

Liverpool went back to the top of the table, with a 3-1 home win over Brighton, their first league victory in five games. West Ham knocked Manchester United off top place, and down to third, edging into second place with a 3-1 win over them at Upton Park.

But only goal difference separates the top three, who all have 22 points. West Brom, hammered 6-1 at Ipswich, are a point behind.

Falling attendances are still the big feature throughout league soccer. The day's biggest gate was 31,684 at West Ham. There was nothing approaching 30,000 anywhere else, with Liverpool attracting only 27,929.

Put another way, there was enough space to spare at Anfield to accommodate both the crowds at Coventry and Notts County.

This week's bottom end of the First Division:

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Arsenal	12	4	3	5	11	12	15
Brighton	12	4	3	5	13	27	15
Ipswich	12	3	5	4	21	14	14
Luton Tn	12	3	5	4	25	25	16
Swansea	12	4	2	6	15	20	14
Wolves	12	4	2	6	15	23	14
Southampton	12	4	2	6	13	24	14
Sunderland	12	3	4	5	17	24	13
Norwich	12	2	5	5	14	21	11
Birmingham	12	1	5	6	7	23	11

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0
NOTTINGHAM FOREST 2
Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Findlay; Donaghy, Goodyear, Money, Turner; Hill, Kellock (Antic, 77 mins), Horton; Stein, Walsh, Moss.

FOREST: Van-Breukelen; Swain, Young, Todd, Gunn; Proctor, Bowyer, Hodge; Birtles, Wallace, Robertson. Sub: Fashanu, not needed.

THE GOALS: Ian Wallace, 30 seconds before half-time, volley after Ian Bowyer's shot hit the bar; Bryn Gunn, 63 minutes, after Garry Birtles and John Robertson caught the Town stretched.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town 12 saved, 12 wide; Forest eight saved, four off target and one hit the bar. Corners: 11-8 to Forest.

ATTENDANCE: 12,648, third lowest in the First Division, and 4,000 fewer than the last time these two teams met in the First Division at Kenilworth Road, 13 years ago.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good contest, but Forest showing a little more expertise and experience deserved a narrow win for their sharpness in the penalty box.

REFEREE: John Moules, Ongar, Essex: rarely noticed so must have had a good game.

BOOKING: Bryn Gunn for a 25th-minute foul on David Moss.



SAVED AGAIN: Hans van-Breukelen preserves the Forest lead as the Town pile on late pressure.