

A severe attack of the Blues

LUTON TOWN 1, COVENTRY CITY 2

A ROUSING recovery attempt after the interval went some way towards wiping out a miserable first 45 minutes as Luton Town stumbled into 1983 at Kenilworth Road. But Coventry, having one of their best seasons for a long time, refused to hand back the points so generously offered them in the first half.

The Town's display until the half-time whistle was difficult to believe. It was diabolical, as manager David Pleat had to admit.

The midfield was almost non-existent, the attack was a one-man band and the over-worked defence yielded two soft goals in the first 15 minutes.

It was men against boys, with the Town looking out of their depth. Coventry, as manager David Sexton said later, are a young team beginning to believe in themselves.

Mr Pleat admires the way they operate on and off the field, on small gates and with transfer dealings needed to balance the books.

TEAM TO ADMIRE

Most of us in the ground admired Coventry for their play by the time they had wrapped up their double over the Town, with their fifth win in six games.

The Sky Blues looked quicker than at Highfield Road in November, when they won 4-2 thanks to a couple of silly late mistakes by Jake Findlay.

Findlay made a save from Jim Melrose in the fourth minute to stave off disaster after a poor clearance by Kirk Stephens, but the goalkeeper was stranded by bad positioning when a free kick was floated to the edge of the penalty area six minutes later. Steve Whitton's header, made under no real pressure, looped over Findlay into the net.

By the 15th minute it was 2-0, with Hunt and Ian Butterworth working the ball down the left wing and Melrose netting from close range. He hit a post with a header soon after that, and Mark Hateley was prevented from scoring only by a vital tackle by Stephens.

A low shot by Ricky Hill was the Town's only serious threat in the first half, but they lifted themselves in the second.

It was a different game, with Coventry forced to defend most of the time: Goalkeeper Les Sealey made two outstanding saves, from David Moss and Brian Horton, and his only mistake was to lose the ball under pressure from a free kick by Moss, allowing Mal Donaghy to force it through to pull a goal back in the 60th minute.

THE MATCH DETAILS

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Fuccillo (Antic 74 mins); Geddis, Walsh, Moss.

COVENTRY: Sealey; Thomas, Dysen, Gillespie, Hormantschuk; Francis, Butterworth, Whitton, Hunt; Hateley, Melrose. Sub: Thompson, not needed.

THE GOALS: Steve Whitton, header over stranded goalkeeper, 10 minutes; Jim Melrose, close range shot, after Ian Butterworth had been allowed to get in a short cross from the by-line, 15 minutes; Mal Donaghy for the Town, bundling in David Moss's far post free kick, 60 minutes.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and seven wide; Coventry six saved, four wide, one hit the post. Corners: 14-7 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 13,072, still a couple of thousand short of break-even.

REFEREE: Daniel Vickers, Ilford.

ENTERTAINMENT: Wretched for Town supporters when their team was over-run in the first half, and not quite capable of repairing the damage in the second.