

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, Fucillo (Antic 74 mins); Geddis, Walsh, Moss.

COVENTRY: Sealey; Thomas, Dysen, Gillespie, Hermantschuk; 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.



HAMMERED: Paul Walsh is nearly on his knees, extreme left, but Phil Parkes is beaten as the Town's first equaliser hits the net at Upton Park on Tuesday.

TEAMWORK NAILS HAMMERS

RESPONDING to the shock of seeing three players dropped, the Town hit top form again at Upton Park on Tuesday night to snatch a thrilling victory when Paul Walsh completed a hat-trick in the last minute.

And if his was a gem of a performance, there were sparkling jewels all round him too as the reshaped Town battled when they had to, and then turned on the style to leave highly-placed West Ham with no complaints about being beaten.

It was a game full of incident and entertainment. Football at its very best," said watching England boss Bobby Robson. "People talk about soccer skills in Brazil and Germany, but you'd never see anything better than that over there."

In a match of flowing fortunes, with each side threatening to gain the upper hand in turn, both goalkeepers had to be on top form. They were, but the luckless Phil Parkes lost out because the Hammers had no-one to match the quicksilver skills of Walsh. The pitch, slippery after heavy rain, was perfect for his delicate touch. He wisted and turned Alvin Martin and Joe Gallagher so often you expected them to come out of attempted tackles wearing the wrong boots.

And after only one goal in his last ten games, he found the target with a vengeance. He hit a post with the game only 17 seconds old, and it was fitting that he should grab the winner 55 seconds into injury time to complete his second hat-trick of the season.

And if Walsh was magic, there was no less effort by the rest of the team. Mitchell Thomas, preferred at left back to Richard Money, had a shaky first ten minutes, then settled down to look like Viv Anderson.

Frank Bunn, replacing David Geddis, looked a far better player than he does in the reserves—perhaps the effect of good players around him is all he needs to make the breakthrough he has sought for so long.

Wayne Turner returned to replace Lil Fucillo, and had a marvellous game, and the whole team bubbled with the sort of confidence and determination that made a mockery of their brief drop into the bottom three of the table.

West Ham boss John Gollan agreed that the Town

REPORTS BY BRIAN SWAIN

deserved to win, despite being behind twice, and like everyone in the stadium was in awe of Walsh's performance.

But it was team effort that brought results, and Walsh and Ricky Hill must have done themselves a good turn by being part of such a superb all-round show in front of the England boss.

The defence was punished for its only serious mistake when a free kick was not cleared and Tony Cottee scored in the 19th minutes, but 19 minutes later Walsh clinically clipped in his first goal after Hill and Bunn forced the opening through the middle.

The Town were threatening to take the Hammers to the cleaners in the second half when they were caught against the run of play. A corner was half-cleared, Geoff Pike struck a thundering 20-yard drive against the bar, and Sandy Clark was quickest to sense the possibilities, and dived to head in the rebound.

The Luton reply was swift and effective. Moss and Bunn worked the ball down the left flank, and from Bunn's pass Walsh twisted a yard clear of Gallagher in the inside left position and shot inside the far corner from the edge of the penalty area.

The West Ham goal had several narrow escapes, with Donaghy and Moss having efforts cleared off the line, before justice was done as the game ticked into injury time.

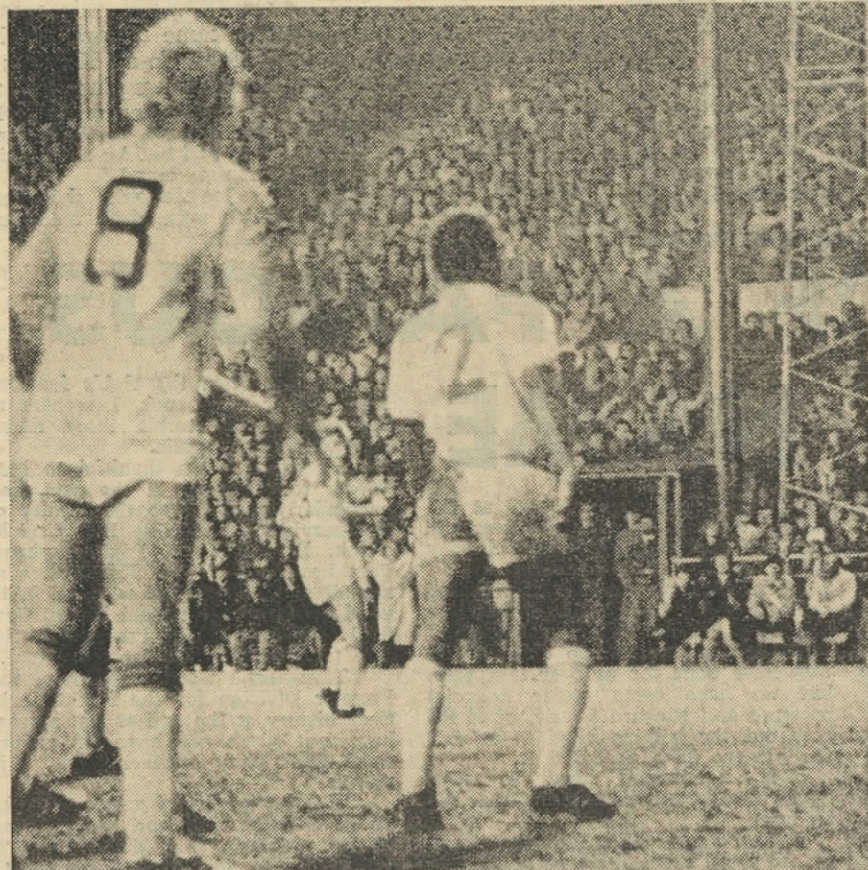
Kirk Stephens tried a through pass down the middle, Ray Stewart fell over as he tried to stop it, and Walsh made goalscoring look easy as he ran through on his own and beat Parkes comfortably.

West Ham boss John Gollan agreed that the Town



● **WINNER:** Walsh draws Phil Parkes before sliding in the injury-time goal that completed his hat-trick at West Ham, and gave the Town their second away win of the season. It pulled them out of the bottom three in the table (See SportsNews 5).

ACTION PICTURES FROM UPTON PARK AND KENILWORTH ROAD BY MARK RICHARDS



● **CONSOLATION:** Mal Donaghy, on the far post, scores the Town's goal against Coventry after goalkeeper Les Sealey has been bamboozled by a curling free kick from David Moss.



Match Details

WEST HAM 2 LUTON TOWN 3
Half-time: 1-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Horton, Turner; Walsh, Bunn (Kellock, 85 mins), Moss.

WEST HAM: Parkes; Allen, Gallagher, Martin (Morgan, 86 mins), Stewart; Dickens, Van der Elst, Pike, Devonshire; Cottee, Clark.

THE GOALS: Cottee for Hammers, 19 mins; Walsh for the Town, 38 mins; Clarke for West Ham, 65 mins; Walsh 73 mins and 45 seconds into injury time.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town ten saved, 11 off target, one hit the post; West Ham eight saved, seven wide, one hit the bar, with a goal from the rebound. Corners: 11-7 to West Ham.

ENTERTAINMENT: Absolutely marvellous, with Walsh's hat-trick clincher in the 90th minute the perfect finale for the Town to a game full of excitement.

REFEREE: Trevor Spencer, Salisbury—given no problems, and caused none.

ATTENDANCE: 21,435, and every one of them will remember the game as superb example of the English First Division at its best.