

# REDS CAN GIVE US ALL THE BLUES

## Four points cushion from bottom three

THE price of their fourth home defeat of the season, against Liverpool on Saturday, was a drop of one place in the First Division for Luton Town. Southampton, who had been below them on goal difference, overtook them, but the Town still have a four-point cushion over the bottom three relegation spots.

Birmingham moved off the bottom place with their first win of 1983, 3-0 at home to West Ham.

Southampton's 4-0 win at The Dell was against Norwich City. It was their first victory in eight games and pushed Norwich deeper into trouble. It was their third defeat in a row, in which the goals aggregate has been 9-1 to the opposition.

Sunderland, bottom two months ago, moved level on points with the Town when they took their run since Christmas to eight league games without defeat. They beat Coventry 2-1 at Roker Park.

Brighton hit rock bottom for the first time this season when Arsenal beat them 2-1 at Highbury. The Seagulls haven't won a league game for two months, since the first match after manager Mike Bailey was sacked for producing boring football.

And the fact that they are still involved in the FA Cup may add to their difficulties in trying to gather league points.

Swansea, First Division surprise packets a year ago, are looking relegation material this time. Watford, the current shock troops, beat them 3-1 at The Vetch on Sunday to wipe out Bob Latchford's joy at giving the Swans the lead with the 200th league goal of his career.

Luther Blissett scored twice to take his tally to 16 this season, the same as Brian Stein.

Today's positions in the lower levels of the First Division:

|             | P  | W | D  | L  | F  | A  | P  |
|-------------|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| Southampton | 26 | 9 | 6  | 11 | 33 | 41 | 33 |
| Notts Co.   | 26 | 9 | 4  | 13 | 32 | 47 | 31 |
| Luton       | 26 | 7 | 9  | 10 | 47 | 54 | 30 |
| Sunderland  | 26 | 7 | 9  | 10 | 39 | 39 | 30 |
| Swansea     | 26 | 7 | 6  | 13 | 32 | 39 | 27 |
| Birmingham  | 26 | 5 | 11 | 10 | 22 | 35 | 26 |
| Norwich     | 26 | 7 | 5  | 14 | 26 | 45 | 26 |
| Brighton    | 26 | 6 | 6  | 14 | 24 | 51 | 24 |

Saturday's fixtures involving the clubs battling for survival:  
Brighton v West Brom; Manchester United v Luton; Norwich v Sunderland; Notts County v Southampton; Tottenham v Swansea; Watford v Birmingham.

IT COULD have been easy for any Luton Town fan to be flattened and depressed on Saturday night after seeing their favourites taken apart by league leaders Liverpool.

The champions, everybody's favourite to retain their title, were a class above the Town, yet TV soccer coverage on Sunday afternoon put the Town's own quality into perspective.

BBC's Match of the Day made the Town look a fair side, and then showed the highlights of a match involving QPR, who look like winning promotion from the Second Division. The comparison between the two games must frighten the Loftus Road club.

And Liverpool skipper Graeme Souness, whose skill, vision and industry made him look the best player in Britain, offered a crumb of comfort when he analysed Luton's attempts to halt a Liverpool run which now stretches to 23 games with only one defeat.

"We remembered them from the game at Anfield," he said. "They were close to beating us there. We played better this time, but I was surprised at how well Luton kept trying to attack us."

"We're on a good run but Luton gave us a good game and they've nothing to be ashamed of."

Liverpool are determined to give manager Bob Paisley



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a prize or two to mark his retirement at the end of the season. Town manager David Pleat has no doubt they'll be champions again — their win at Kenilworth Road put them 12 points clear of the field.

### GOING WELL

They might just pull off an amazing grand slam, because they are also going well in the FA Cup, the Milk Cup and the European Cup.

On current form, Liverpool are in a league of their own, with the rest of the First Division also-rans. And I for one needed the TV reminder that watching the also-rans like Luton is still a lot better than Second Division soccer.

Liverpool were quite astonishing: they played short passes from one end of the field to the other, even in their own penalty area. Their understanding is so good that often they seemed to have three or four extra players on the pitch.

The Town tried to make progress by giving David Moss a free-running commission behind Paul Walsh and Brian Stein. They looked for a longer pass than usual, hoping to get past the Liverpool defence

by speedy running on to passes over the top or through gaps.

It took Liverpool half an hour to adjust to the problems the Town posed and perhaps the worst thing that happened was that the Town scored first.

Kirk Stephens had a good first half with forward runs. He sent Moss away down the right in the second minute, and from his low cross Walsh was only just short of making decisive contact at the near post.

Stein put a good chance wide after another good run by Stephens, but quickly made amends when he headed the Town into the lead in the 31st minute. Ricky Hill and Moss exchanged passes to break through midfield and from Mill's final pass Walsh shot for goal. Bruce Grobbelaar managed to block the ball, but from the rebound Hill got in a shot which was deflected to Stein, and his head did the rest.

### AWESOME

Liverpool's reply was an awesome demonstration of their powers, and the TV coverage gave everyone a chance to admire it. From the restart six Liverpool players played nine passes,

with Souness putting the last of them to Ian Rush, the First Division's top scorer. He used his hands to control the ball, with the ref unsighted, but lashed in a shot which counted as the equaliser. It took just 23 seconds from kick-off to net, with no Town player getting a touch.

At Anfield in September the Town had been capable of recovering from that sort of shock, but Liverpool are a different team now. They have welded into a unit which denies opponents the ball for long spells and is content to knock passes around anywhere while waiting for an opening to appear.

A dummy by Souness from David Hodgson's right wing low cross to the back of the penalty area gave Alan Kennedy the chance to hit Liverpool's second two minutes before the break.

### QUALITY

Just before half-time Hill produced a sharp header from a clipped pass by Stein, but Grobbelaar got down quickly to make a good save to underline the quality running right through the visiting team.

Stein almost beat the goalkeeper in the second-half with a clever lob, but Grobbelaar back-pedalled six yards to flip that effort over the bar.

But on the score of chances created Liverpool were supreme and in the end the Town were fortunate not to escape a real hammering.

The third goal arrived in the 79th minute, another example of how expert Liverpool can be. Sammy Lee took a throw-in to Souness. His forward pass to Hodgson just inside the penalty area was laid back first time, and Souness cracked a shot apparently without thinking or taking aim, a brilliant bender from 25 yards into the net of the inside of the post.

### WOODWORK

Walsh's only serious contribution of the second half came in the final minute with a tricky run along the by-line which took him past Lawrenson and Souness before Grobbelaar smothered the angled shot.

Danger was much more pronounced at the other end. Kenny Dalglish hit the post in the first half, and Rush passed up the chance of at least a hat-trick, shooting wide from good positions three times, once when Richard Money lost possession in his own area. And Souness hit the bar with a 30-yard free kick.

Even a half-time substitution, when Ronny Whelan took over from the injured Craig Johnston, made no difference to Liverpool's smoothness.

They looked a complete team. I don't like seeing Luton Town beaten, but to be second best to Liverpool is no disgrace. Teams like QPR, Wolves and Fulham are flogging themselves through the Second Division just to have the right to be on the same pitch as the mighty Reds.

## Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1 LIVERPOOL 3

Half-time: 1-2

LUTON TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money (Antic, 68 mins); Hill, Horton, Turner; Stein, Walsh, Moss.

LIVERPOOL: Grobbelaar; Neal, Lawrenson, Hansen, Kennedy; Johnston (Whelan second half), Dalglish, Lee, Souness; Rush, Hodgson.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein header for the Town, 31 minutes, from Ricky Hill's deflected shot; Ian Rush equaliser 23 seconds from the restart without a Town player touching the ball; Alan Kennedy, 43 minutes, 20-yard drive; Graeme Souness, 79 minutes, brilliant 25-yard curler in off the post.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Liverpool, six saved, 11 wide, two hit the woodwork; Town, five saved, three wide. Corners: 11-5 to Liverpool.

ATTENDANCE: 18,434, the day's third highest in the First Division.

REFEREE: Brian Hill, Kettering—caught out of position when Ian Rush handled before scoring, as TV showed, but otherwise had no difficult decisions to make.

ENTERTAINMENT: Fabulous stuff from Liverpool and the Town were no match for them—but nor is any other team in the First Division when Liverpool hit this sort of form.



● NICE ONE: Brian Stein is congratulated by Brian Horton and Richard Money after heading the Town into the lead against Liverpool.



● STOP THAT: Paul Walsh has Mark Lawrenson at full stretch but still unable to stop a shot going goalwards. This was the start of the action that brought Brian Stein his first league goal since returning to the side after a seven-week injury absence — Bruce Grobbelaar blocked this shot, but Ricky Hill got to the rebound first to make the opening for Stein's 16th goal of the season.

Picture: JOHN SHORTHOUSE