

Norwich show how to strike for survival

LUTON TOWN 0, NORWICH CITY 1

SUPER save in the final minute by Chris Woods from a flicked shot by David Moss prevented the Town pinching a last-kick point at Kenilworth Road against fellow strugglers Norwich.

But it would have been robbery if the goalkeeper had been beaten, because Norwich were close to humiliating the Town. Having scored in the 26th minute they settled down to cover and smother the Town's midfield and attack, and they rarely looked like giving goals away.

Worse from the point of view of the long-suffering home supporters, Norwich were the team who looked as though they wanted to fight for survival. Veteran Mick Channon believed his team's attitude to the game was the crucial difference.

With Wayne Turner dropped, Mitchell Thomas recalled defence and Mal Donaghy pushed forward into the problem position on the left of midfield, the Town looked Norwich's equals only for the first ten minutes.

That was how long it took Steve Walford and Dave Watson to sort out the problems Paul Walsh posed, and once that little difficulty was overcome Norwich were on top.

Walsh and Ricky Hill both put shots wide in that early spell, and Woods made a good double save at the feet of Walsh and Trevor Aylott.

SPLIT ON THE BREAK

Norwich struck on the counter-attack and the Town's defence was split for the only goal. Martin O'Neill, director of most Norwich attacks from midfield, fed Channon on the Town's left. He by-passed Paul Elliott and Clive Goodwin with a diagonal chip towards the far post, where Kirk Stephens failed with an attempt to head clear and Dave Bennett scored with a crisp short-range volley.

Norwich then showed the dogged fighting spirit that has yet save them from their second relegation in three years. They pulled eight men back, and the Town rarely looked like getting past two four-man defensive walls.

Norwich were always dangerous on the break, with Keith Bertschin out of luck seven minutes into the second half with a 20-yarder which hit the bar with Tony Godden's save.

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Godden; Stephens, Elliott, Goodyear, Thomas (Daniel mins); Hill, Horton, Donaghy; Walsh, Aylott, Moss.
NORWICH: Woods; Haylock, Walford, Watson, Downs; Mendham, Melli, Deehan, Bennett; Bertschin, Channon (Jack, 86 mins).
THE GOAL: Dave Bennett volley, 26 mins, from Mick Channon's cross.
OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town five saved, seven wide; Norwich two saved, five wide, one hit the bar. Corners: 10-8 to Norwich.
ATTENDANCE: 11,211, day's lowest in the First Division.
ENTERTAINMENT: Probably also the day's lowest for home fans.
REFEREE: Michael James, Horsham.

● BEATEN in both holiday games, at home by Norwich and away to Watford, Luton Town are today bottom of the First Division for the first time this season.

They were one place above the bottom three until Saturday's home defeat against rivals in distress Norwich, when they dropped to 20th place. Monday's defeat at Watford dropped

ped the Hatters another notch, to 21st, and they hit rock bottom on Tuesday night when Brighton overtook them with a 0-0 draw at Southampton.

Luton's possible lifeline is matches in hand. They can escape if they win those, starting with Tuesday's home clash with Birmingham City.

Easter match reports are by Brian Swain, pictures by Mark Richards.

RELEGATION FIGHTERS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	36	11	8	17	43	63	41
Norwich	34	9	10	15	36	52	37
Swansea	35	9	9	17	45	55	36
Brighton	35	8	11	16	33	60	35
Birmingham	34	7	13	14	31	46	34
Luton Town	33	8	10	15	52	70	34



● FOILED: David Moss sees Chris Woods save his last-minute shot against Norwich.

REF CONTRIBUTES TO DERBY AGONY

ALTHOUGH THE scoreline makes it sound worse, Monday's performance at Watford was far more encouraging than Saturday's surrender to Norwich.

The Town were 2-1 up and looking the better side until an eight-minute spell either side of the interval wrecked them. A crackpot refereeing decision which reduced them to ten men for the final 30 minutes ended the contest and denied the crowd the continued entertainment they deserved.

Even Watford's players and fans were mystified when Raddy Antic was sent off. He had been booked for dissent for protesting that Mal Donaghy had been fouled when Watford scored in the sixth minute. In the 59th minute he and Les Taylor both went for a bouncing ball and Torquay policeman Les Shapter called the challenge a foul by Antic. If it was, it was very innocuous, and Taylor wasn't complaining.

Mr Shapter's decision to consider it an offence worthy of a second caution was ludicrous.

Mr Shapter dished out five cautions, yet although the game was full-blooded and competitive his actions made it sound more of a physical battle than it was. A ref with more feeling for the occasion would probably have had a firm word and let the game continue.

It was as good a local derby as I have seen in many years. Watford were all hustle and bustle, quick to raid down the flanks and bang across centres, most hit with immense pace and power.

Their football was direct and simple. The Town,

DAVID PLEAT'S VIEWPOINT: SPORTSNEWS 4

with David Pleat shuffling his formation to combat the expected tactics, looked a far better side than they had done against Norwich.

Mitchell Thomas was out injured and Clive Goodyear was dropped. Richard Money was recalled in defence, with Mal Donaghy dropping back to play alongside Paul Elliott, and Antic was put into midfield, where the balance looked better.

Ricky Hill's forward bursts, and his linking with Paul Walsh, re-awakened memories of how incisive the Town were earlier in the season, and with Money and Kirk Stephens getting down the flanks on counter-attacks, we had a classic confrontation for the first 45 minutes.

Disastrously, two mistakes gave away goals in the first four minutes of the second half, and while I don't think the Town were going to recover from those, Mr Shapter's intervention with the sending-off ended the contest half an hour early.

It became one of those days when a team that needs the rub of the green is hammered because knife-edge decisions and actions drop the wrong way.

By the end of the confidence was waning with the Town again in a situation where they expected the worst.

Watford had the boost of an early goal when Luther Blissett raced in at the far post to score from John Barnes's low hard cross, with the Town complaining that Donaghy was pushed to stop him making a clearance.

The response was positive and attractive, and Watford were forced back as the Town turned on the style, passing accurately and finding space to build attacks.

Walsh looked lively, and twice broke clear down the Town's right. His first burst ended with a shot

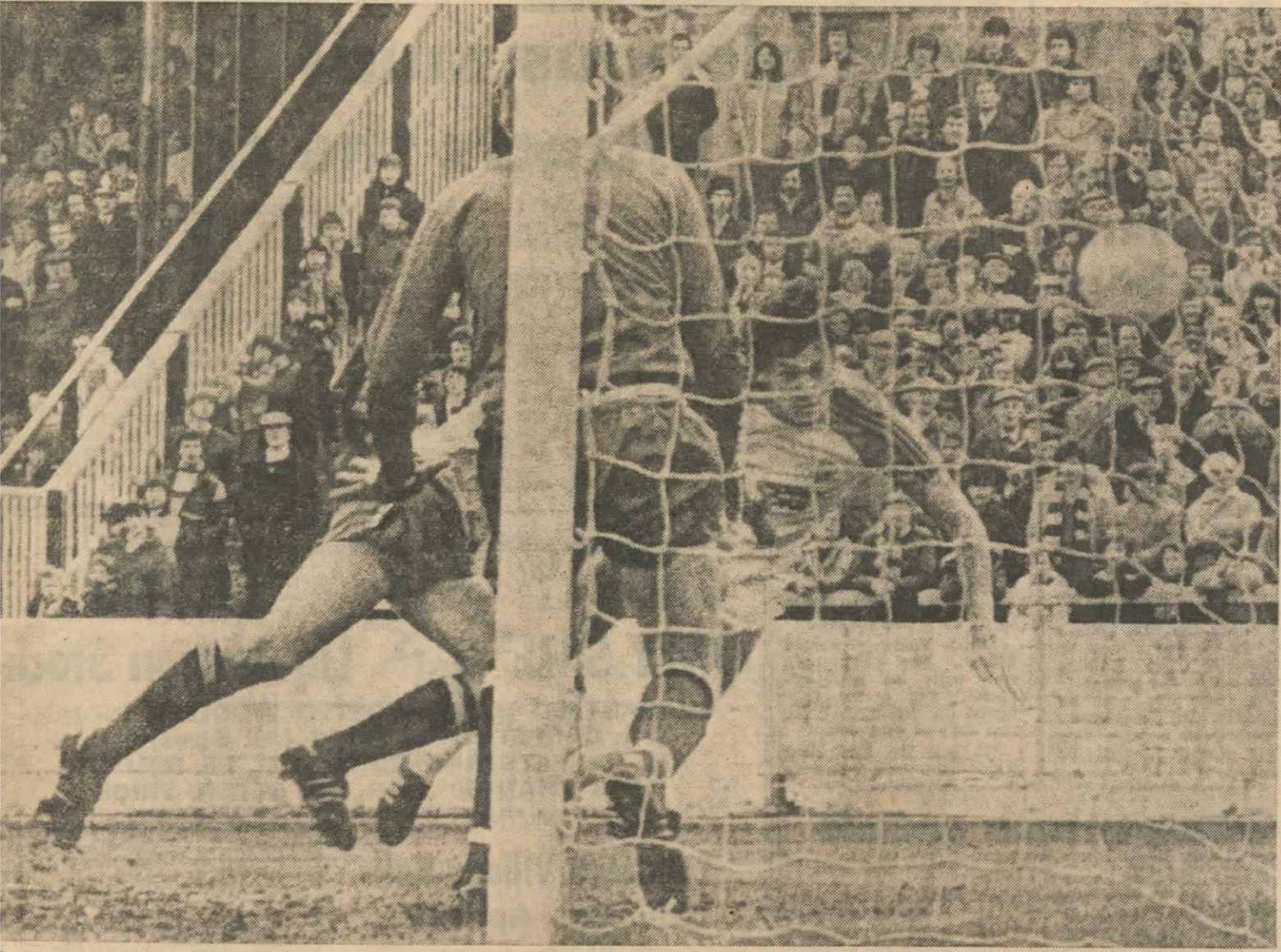
wide of the target and his second brought the equaliser. Trevor Aylott rose at the far post to head his first Division One goal from Walsh's deep cross.

Watford were second best for a spell, and after Hill had a shot deflected over the bar the Town went ahead in the 29th minute. Horton cracked in a 25-yard thunderbolt from Walsh's lay-back after Aylott and Money had worked the ball down the left flank.

The Town looked winners from then on, until the crucial spell which began with Richard Jobson equalising in the 42nd minute. His goal was similar to Horton's, with Wilf Rostron making the flank run and Taylor knocking the ball back.

The rest was anti-climax. Paul Elliott made two mistakes to give Watford the lead at 4-2 by the 49th minute. His mis-timed tackle on Taylor gave Blissett his second goal, from the penalty, and a back-pass enabled Barnes to nip in and flick the ball over Tony Godden.

Antic's sending off finished the spectacle, with the weary ten men conceding a final goal to Nigel Callaghan 12 minutes from time.



● EQUALISER: Trevor Aylott dives to score his first goal in Division One, at Watford on Monday.

Match Details

WATFORD 5 LUTON TOWN 2
Half-time: 2-2
TOWN: Godden; Stephens, Elliott, Donaghy, Money; Hill, Horton, Antic; Walsh, Aylott, Moss. Sub: Turner, not used.
WATFORD: Sherwood; Rice, Terry, Jackett, Rostron; Taylor, Lohman, Jobson; Callaghan (Armstrong, 82 mins), Barnes, Blissett.
THE GOALS. Blissett for Watford, 6 mins; Aylott for the Town, 16 mins; Horton for the Town, 29 mins; Jobson for Watford, 42 mins; Blissett penalty, 48 mins; Barnes for Watford, 49 mins; Callaghan for Watford, 78 mins.
OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved, five wide; Watford five saved, eight wide, one disallowed. Corners: 12-6 to Watford.
ATTENDANCE: 20,120, which is 8,000 below capacity.
REFEREE: Les Shapter, Torquay—spoiled the contest and short-changed the customers by a ludicrous sending-off of Raddy Antic in the 59th minute.
ENTERTAINMENT: Marvellous stuff for the first half, but Watford were too much on top in the second to allow the Town fans to enjoy their day out as much as they might have done.
BOOKED: Raddy Antic for dissent, Richard Money, Paul Walsh, Pat Rice and Nigel Callaghan, all for fouls.
SENT OFF: Raddy Antic for a challenge that hardly looked a foul, let alone a second bookable offence, in the 59th minute.