

Last MAINE ROAD Meeting . . .

Saturday, 14th May, 1983

Manchester City 0 . . . Luton Town 1

City: Williams; Ranson, McDonald; Reid, Bond, Caton; Tueart, Reeves, Baker* (sub: Kinsey* 86th), Hartford, Power.

Luton: Godden; Stephens, Goodyear; Horton, Elliott, Donaghy; Hill, Aylott, Walsh, Turner* (sub: Antic* 64th min), Stein.

Scorer: Antic (Luton) 85th min.

Referee: Arnold Challinor (Rotherham).

Attendance: 42,843.

Who can forget it? Quite possibly the blackest day in City's modern history. Defeat, the 21st of the season, that stunned Maine Road and sent City shell-shocked into the Second Division in the critical closing game of the 1982-83 season. And victory 5 minutes from time that meant Luton remarkably escaped going through that same trap-door . . . at City's grave expense. And the BBC television cameras were there to record the misery.

City needed **one** point to survive, for Luton a win was their **only** solution. Bottom club Brighton and Swansea were already relegated and this tension-charged match was to decide who would join them.

There was little for the Blues to feel proud about. Luton were the superior team and had the better individual performances—and a few among the Maine Road crowd did not distinguish themselves by invading the pitch in a threatening manner at the final whistle. It was a shameful occasion in every sense.

The deciding goal came from substitute **Raddy Antic**, only his second of the season, after the visitors had four times probed dangerously at the City goal. The tragic moment developed from a right wing cross despatched by **Brian Stein**, recalled for this match. Goalkeeper **Alex Williams** could only punch the tricky centre and it fell the way of Antic, who smacked a fierce low drive through a packed penalty area.

Scenes of ecstasy ensued from the Luton camp as teammates smothered the marksman and they rolled about on the Maine Road pitch in unashamed delight at the thought of their salvation.

The City players were gutted, unable to comprehend the savagery of the sentence they were to face in the Second Division for the next two seasons.

Yet there could be little for City to complain about. Though Luton had arrived with the worst defensive record in the First Division their 'keeper, **Tony Godden**, did not have a serious shot to handle in the whole 90 minutes. The biggest worries he had were from a lunge by **Bobby McDonald** as the ball ran loose and a **Tommy Caton** header into the area with the 'keeper out of position.

Nervous and edgy, the Blues mustered a couple of early openings for **Kevin Reeves** (a cross-shot wide) and **Dennis Tueart**, neither of them amounting to much. There was a constant attempt by **Asa Hartford** to whip the team into concerted action but while he battled to the last breath in midfield the response around him was muted.

In an unmemorable first half there was only one shot on target and not many more were wide of the mark.

Paul Walsh was a lively striker for Luton and in the 62nd minute demanded a superb reflex save with his legs from Williams. There were earlier efforts from Stein and **Mal Donaghy**. But it was full back **Kirk Stephens** who proved a formidable figure with powerful bursts from his own back-line and from one such attacking sprint City found themselves in total disarray. Williams partly saved the Stephens attempt, but the ball spun away and struck **Nicky Reid** before clattering back against the home post—a 72nd minute let-off.

By this time Antic was on for **Wayne Turner** and Luton were carrying the game to the Blues. There was one respite

when Tueart sent a header flashing close in the 83rd minute. Then it was Luton's turn—and the killer goal.

City sent on **Steve Kinsey**, a desperation measure with barely 4 minutes to go, and it was an all-or-nothing finish from the Blues as they fussed around the Luton goal zone. Without suggesting that salvation was at hand.

The final whistle brought jubilation to the Luton camp with manager **David Pleat** dashing onto the pitch to celebrate his team's famous rescue act. But there were also ill-mannered City fans swarming onto the pitch and it looked threatening when three Luton players—**Ricky Hill**, **Paul Elliott** and **Trevor Aylott**—were confronted by the small group of louts. Punches were aimed but mounted police arrived on the scene to clear the playing area.

So it was back to the Second Division for City, repeating the demise of May 1963.

Manager **John Benson**, soon to be relieved of his job and its worries, said later: "I'm glad it's all over. It's been hard graft. We have not been able to do our jobs properly. We had to con players who have conned us for nine months . . . I'm not going to live through that every week, no way. I would rather play kids right from the start." He wasn't to get the chance.

For Luton it was survival in their first season back in the First Division. The Hatters had picked up 21 of their 49 points away from home—only Liverpool had scored more goals than them in away games—so it was a vindication of the bold attacking policy pursued by manager Pleat.

Star Men: **ASA HARTFORD** (City)

PAUL WALSH (Luton).