

SPORT AND MOTORING

Town Match Verdict ★★★★★

TOOTHLESS WOLVES TAKE A MAULING

JUST over a year ago the Town's best First Division victory of the season saw Brighton thrashed 5-0 at Kenilworth Road. The south coast club were relegated a few months later.

To set this week's 4-0 hammering of Wolves into perspective, the Wolves without bite are destined for the same fate unless something very drastic happens at Molineux.

If anything they were even worse than Brighton, with a defence that didn't want to tackle, a midfield with no heart and a forward line that hardly saw the ball.

And because of that manager David Pleat was not as pleased with the result as he might have been. He complained that the Town should have had a lot more goals, particularly in the last 20 minutes when Wolves were thoroughly demoralised.

Wolves' boss Graham Hawkins was grateful to go home without a six or seven-goal hammering, and left to clutch at very flimsy straws of consolation.

His newly-promoted team

is still looking for its first victory of the season. He hopes that they will take heart from the Town's experience last term.

"A year ago Luton were struggling to hold on. But they learned a lot, and so must we," he said.

His problem is that learning is not enough if you don't have the skill quality of a Paul Walsh or a Brian Stein in attack, the resolute leadership of a Brian Horton, and the ever-improving defensive qualities of the Town's current back four.

I felt the Town manager was unkind to his own team. The visitors were so awful that it must have been difficult to raise the extra yard to strain for more goals.

Wolves never looked like posing a real threat to Les Sealey until the points were decided, and however bad the opposition, a four-goal margin is emphatic enough.

Perhaps Walsh and Stein were given too much space, but what a treat it was to see them both back to something like their best form. England

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards



● THROUGH THE GAP: David Moss steers his shot into the net for the Town's third goal.

Goal figure is better

THE second clean sheet of the season was as welcome as the four goals at the other end as the Town's victory over Wolves pushed them into seventh place in the First Division table.

They are five points off top place, and the goal difference, 14 scored and seven conceded in six games, compares with 16-14 at the same stage last season.

The Town inched nearer to the top of the table because teams above them had a wretched day. West Ham lost their 100 per cent record when they were beaten by Gary Thompson's goal in the last four minutes at West Brom.

Ipswich lost second place when Birmingham beat them 1-0 at St Andrew's and Manchester United suffered their second defeat of the season, losing 0-3 at Southampton.

The Town moved ahead of Aston Villa because they lost at Liverpool. With all teams having played six league matches, West Ham lead with 15 points, followed by Southampton and Liverpool 14, Ipswich 13, Manchester United 12, and Coventry 11. Goal difference puts the Town ahead of Aston Villa, Nottingham Forest and Birmingham, who also have ten points.

Down at the bottom Leicester are still looking for their first point. Their second goal of the season, at Coventry, was not enough to break the duck.

Wolves are in 21st place, with two points, and Stoke have three. Watford hammered them 4-0 at The Victoria Ground, and Stoke's September record so far is played four, lost four, 11 goals conceded and not one scored.

under-21 boss Dave Sexton certainly enjoyed it.

David Moss revelled in the room he was given to prove that he is still a superb provider of crosses and a clinical taker of goals against defenders who don't fancy tackling.

The midfield strolled through proceedings, and will rarely have it so easy. Yet the success there was so self-effacing that the contributions of Horton, Ricky Hill and Frank Bunn were in danger of being forgotten.

I would have liked to see Hill and Bunn getting further forward for shots at goal, yet the tight covering in the centre of the pitch probably did more to upset Wolves than anything else.

And tighter defensive work is the extra bonus the Town need throughout this season. While Walsh and Stein were making Alan Dodd and John Pender look like carthorses at the other end, Mal Donaghy and Paul Elliott looked pedigree defenders.

Kirk Stephens has recaptured his form with a vengeance, and the happiest player at Kenilworth Road this week ought to be Wayne Turner.

Last season he was the utility man, pushed and

pulled into the side with no settled position. As a left-sided midfielder he became the butt of fans who weren't satisfied with 100 per cent endeavour.

Now, as a left back reasonably sure of his place, he has shown that he has more than effort and loyalty to offer. He has taken his chance since Richard Money left and has earned the opportunity on merit. With confidence growing all the time he deserves every plaudit he is winning nowadays.

My only doubts during the game were at half-time, when the Town had outclassed Wolves and had only one goal to show for it. Very often in those circumstances a team will enjoy its luck by turning the tables in the second half.

Wolves had been given some hope by early saves by John Burridge from Walsh and Bunn, but Walsh conjured up the first goal while the Town were down to ten men for a seven-minute spell.

Donaghy was having a head wound stitched in the dressing room as Walsh took on the Wolves defence and got in a shot which Pender headed round the post. Moss dropped the corner to the

near post and with Hill's dummy run drawing the defence Walsh headed a simple goal.

Stein finished the game as a contest six minutes into the second half with a superb 30-yard run. Defenders watched and waited as he took the ball from left to right across the edge of the penalty area before cutting a right-footed shot back into the corner of the net past Burridge's right hand.

Moss helped himself to a solo goal after being sent down the right by Horton's long ball, with Geoff Palmer left confused and helpless by Moss's control before the ball hit the net.

Horton rapped in the fourth with a shot from outside the area a few minutes after Elliott's only mistake of the match had given Gray an opening. Sealey denied Gray with a lovely save, fingertips the ball over the bar.

Mr Hawkins went home after telling us that he didn't feel too disgraced at being beaten by one of the better teams in the First Division. He may well be right, and I'll believe it even more if Brian Clough has cause to tell us the same in Nottingham on Saturday.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 4 WOLVES 0

Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Donaghy, Turner; Hill, Horton, Bunn; Walsh, Stein, Moss.

WOLVES: Burridge; Humphrey, Pender, Dodd, Palmer (Hibbitt, 66 mins.); Rudge, Cartwright, Towner; Livingstone, Gray, Eves.

THE GOALS: Paul Walsh header, 23 mins.; Brian Stein, solo run and shot, 51 mins.; David Moss run and shot, 63 mins.; Brian Horton, 20-yard drive, 77 mins.

OTHER STRIKES AT GOAL: Town ten saved and ten wide; Wolves six blocked and seven off target. Corners: 12-3 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 10,975—only Notts County had a lower First Division gate on Saturday... perhaps they should move to Milton Keynes.

ENTERTAINMENT: Great stuff for Town fans, but Wolves really were made to look awful.

REFEREE: David Lettis, Basingstoke. Spoiled a good performance by tetchy bookings of Brian Horton and Andy Gray. It was a sporting game throughout.



ON THE WAY: Brian Stein hammers the Town's second goal.



● HIGH FLYER: Paul Walsh delivers a bicycle-kick volley which produced John Burridge's best save of the match, early in the first half.

YORKSHIRE TRIP IN CUP

MIXED memories for both clubs were revived when the Milk Cup draw paired the Town with Rotherham in the second round.

The first leg will be at Millmoor on Tuesday week, October 4, with the return at Kenilworth Road three weeks later.

For the first time the draw for the second round was seeded to ensure that every David had the chance of meeting a Goliath and generate extra turnstile income.

The Town's last visit to Rotherham was in April last year. The Town were top of the table, needing to win to make promotion a certainty.

Rotherham, newly promoted, were fourth in the table with a good chance of going up to the First Division for the first time in their history.

It ended in a 2-2 draw, with Ronnie Moore and John Seaman scoring for

Rotherham and Richard Money and Lil Fuccillo the Town's marksmen.

The drama was in injury time, when stand-in goalkeeper Alan Judge saved a penalty from Gerry Gow. The Town had to wait another week for the 4-1 win over Shrewsbury to clinch promotion.

Judge's dramatic save turned out to be a turning point for Rotherham. The following week Gow missed another penalty as Rotherham lost 2-1 at Orient. If those two misses had been goals instead, Rotherham would have been promoted.

Within a year they had been relegated, but they now have high hopes of getting out of the Third Division again, despite going down to their first home defeat of the season on Saturday. Orient beat them 1-0 to go top, leaving Rotherham in sixth place.