

BARGAIN BUY GIVES CLOUGH RIGHT CHANGE

ADMIRER for his record of unearthing talent down in the lower leagues and in non-league football, Luton Town boss David Pleat suffered the irony of being beaten this week because another manager had done exactly the same thing.

Playing only his third full game for Nottingham Forest's first team, 21-year-old Steve Wigley had an inspired 15-minute spell on their right wing early in the second half, and it was enough to beat the Town.

Bought by Brian Clough for £2,000 from Ashton-under-Lyne, the youngster hammered over the low cross which Ian Wallace swept into the net in the 58th minute to punish a Town performance which failed for lack of sharpness in the box.

Pleat, himself a young right winger at Forest nearly 20 years ago, couldn't enjoy the irony of the situation.

"We didn't start playing until it was too late, when we were a goal down," he complained. "We didn't do ourselves justice."

The other major irony was that the Town's strikeforce of Paul Walsh and Brian Stein, publicly praised before the game by Clough, were snuffed out by the physical strength of Paul Hart and the expertise of Colin Todd.

Todd is nearly 35 and Walsh, so outstanding for England under-21 a few days earlier, came off second best. He found space for a couple of headers and a shot or two from outside the box, but none troubled Hans van Breukelen too much.

Stein, another England star unable to reproduce the sparkle in a league game, was a lot closer to scoring, although he too put an early header wide, from a good cross supplied by Walsh.

SKILL

And Stein produced the best moment of football skill with 12 minutes to go, taking a through pass by Kirk Stephens on his chest and hitting a thundering half-volley towards the top corner of the net. Van

**Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards**

Breukelen pulled off a tremendous save.

The Town could argue that they deserved an equaliser at that stage, but just as surely Forest should have had a second goal in the last minute when Wigley's cross left Birtles with only Les Sealey to beat. The header went over the bar when it looked easier to score.

Wigley's inexperience may have saved the Town from more trouble, because while he saw plenty of the ball he did not cross it as consistently as he might have done.

ROCKY

But the Town's left flank looked rocky at times, particularly in the first 15 minutes after the break. At half-time Clough had told Wigley to stop worrying about the accuracy of his crosses. Whack the ball over as hard and as often as possible was Clough's instruction, and Wallace's goal, taken with a good shot on the turn, was the result.

At half-time, when the score-sheet was still blank, I felt the Town were not in real trouble, and could produce the extra spark to win.

Paul Elliott and Mal Donaghy rarely gave space to Birtles and Wallace, and when shots were on target Sealey was invariably well positioned to make the saves look easy.

The midfield confronta-

tion turned on Forest's short spell of domination down their right, and the move that brought the goal started with a mis-timed tackle by Frank Bunn which gave away a free kick.

WEAK SPOT

Clough had picked out that weak spot before the game, and the Town weren't quite sharp enough to turn that tactic to their advantage.

Some of the best Town play came when they could counter-attack, with Stephens and Donaghy both driving forward from the back.

But as the minutes ticked by the warning of manager Pleat after the home win over Wolves kept returning to mind. Beating the bad teams solves half the problems — competing with the best is the really hard thing.

FAILED

And on the evidence from the City Ground, Forest are not one of the top teams of the First Division this season. The Town were the first league opponents this season to fail to score against them.

Even the introduction of Raddy Antic for Bunn with 23 minutes to go was unable to produce the goods, and the Yugoslav's booking for a trip on Steve Hodge just about summed up the afternoon. It was one of those days.