

SPORT AND MOTORING

Town Match Verdict ★

ARTIFICIAL FOOTBALL
SHORT-CHANGES FANS

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0, QUEENS PARK RANGERS 0

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Goodyear, Thomas; Hill, Horton, Donaghy; Stein, Walsh, Aylott. Sub: Parker, not used.

RANGERS: Hucker; Neill, Wicks, Fenwick, Dawes; Fillery, Waddock, Gregory, Stewart; Charles (Allen, 11 mins), Stainrod.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and six wide; Rangers three saved, three wide. Corners: 6-4 to Rangers. ENTERTAINMENT: The worst in a Town v Rangers match for a very long time, with the visitors offering nothing in the way of positive attacking and the Town unable to beat their offside tactics.

REFEREE: Neal Midgley, Salford. Waited too long to take action over the physical contact that helped to spoil the game.

BOOKINGS: Terry Fenwick for a wicked over-the-knee tackle on Brian Horton in the 81st minute, a reprisal for Horton's 11th-minute challenge on Jeremy Charles which resulted in the Welsh striker going off on a stretcher; Horton and John Gregory of Rangers for dissent, both in the final two minutes.

ATTENDANCE: 11,922—only bottom clubs Wolves and Notts County attracted fewer fans.

WITH football as sterile as his artificial pitch at Loftus Road, QPR manager Terry Venables did nothing for the game that gives him a good living when he brought his team to Kenilworth Road. Determination not to lose seemed to be his overriding requirement.

Luton Town boss David Pleat found himself glad of a point from a bruising unattractive match, but saddened by the way his team is having to fight to end its slide down the table.

Rangers had a very robust defence and a well-drilled offside routine. I recall England manager Bobby Robson being at Loftus Road in November when the Town won there 1-0.

He was pleased about that result. "Artificial grass means artificial football," was one of his comments on a day when the absence of David Moss was not crucial because Omniturf is no good for wingers.

The return match cried out for a Moss to get round the back of a Rangers defence which was square, despite being unyielding in the tackle.

INSPIRATION NEEDED

One or two inspired moments to defeat the offside game would have done everyone a favour, but with stalemate lasting from first kick to last the customers got very little value for money.

Mr Venables said it was a stinker, but denied that the offside trap played a major part. He claimed Rangers had sprung it twice, and that all the other times it happened was down to Luton's ineptness.

Mr Pleat apologised for the circumstances which contributed to a most unusual approach from his side. A couple of weeks ago we all enjoyed a 0-0 draw against Liverpool, where survival and hard physical effort was the keynote for both teams.

Against Rangers, it was nothing like so attractive, with niggles and nastiness added to the aggression that stifled flair.

Rangers believed Town skipper Brian Horton started it with a tackle which left Welsh international Jeremy Charles flattened in the 11th minute. He was carried off with a thigh injury and replaced by sub Clive Allen.

Referee Neal Midgley decided Horton's challenge on Charles was not a foul. I thought it was. And Mr Midgley let so much over-robust tackling go by without taking firm action that negative clog and counter-clog became established as the pattern.

The only tiny consolation I could draw was that at least a team brought up on skill and attack could defend itself when necessary.

Emeka Nwajioji and Ray Daniel were left out, to allow Trevor Aylott to return and Mal Donaghy to go back into midfield. With most of the match compressed into the centre circle area, Donaghy and Horton gave as good as they got, and Ricky Hill very nearly turned the game with a couple of good runs that failed for want of a shot at the end of them.

Clive Goodyear was recalled to partner Paul Elliott in the centre of defence, and did everything that was asked of him. He would have shone more, no doubt, if Rangers had asked more.

MORE LIKELY

Neither team mounted consistent pressure, although the Town usually looked more likely to find a way through. Brian Stein, like Paul Walsh unable to make an impression against brute strength, missed their best chance when he beat the offside trap, got through on a solo run and allowed Peter Hucker to save.

Horton almost scored through a crowded penalty area in the second half when Aylott's challenge on Hucker let the ball run loose from a cross by Stein. With the goalkeeper grounded, Steve Wicks made the saving block.

Rangers' best efforts were a first-half header by Wicks which Mitchell Thomas cleared, and a second-half snap-shot by Allen which Les Sealey caught.

Rangers made little attempt to attack in force. Reprisal against Horton was uppermost in some minds, and eventually Terry Fenwick exacted revenge nine minutes from time.

His tackle was so high it left Horton with a foot-long gash on his thigh. Fenwick was booked when he should have been sent off.

Horton limped on, then spoiled his efforts by collecting a late booking for dissent over a corner kick. That takes him past 21 points, and brings an automatic one-match ban.

If Kenilworth Road hosts many more teams as negative and boring as Rangers, the customers will suspend themselves. It wasn't football.

REPORTS
By BRIAN
SWAINPICTURES
By MARK
RICHARDS

● DOUBLE BLANK: Content to defend in depth, Rangers thwart Paul Walsh and Trevor Aylott with two men shielding the ball.



● OPPORTUNITY MISSED: Brian Stein is clear after his run and Aylott's pass beats the offside trap, but Hucker does enough to deflect the shot and Luton's best chance of scoring is lost.

Dream is
in need of
a good run

ALTHOUGH they are still looking for their first home win of 1984, the Town are among the clubs with a chance of European football next season if they can produce a good run.

The draw against QPR edged them up one place in the First Division, to tenth. With 41 points from 29 matches, they are six points adrift of the top six places.

They climbed above Aston Villa this week, thanks to Manchester United's 3-0 victory at Villa Park.

With the Merseyside local derby ending in a 1-1 draw—Jan Rush scored his 33rd goal of the season for Liverpool—United are now only two points behind the leaders.

It looks like a two-team race for the championship, because third-placed Forest dropped further behind when they were on the receiving end of the week's major surprise.

Bottom club Wolves beat them 1-0, only their third home win of the season, with Forest defender Paul Hart putting the winner into his own net in the last minute.

West Ham are still fourth after an easy 3-0 win at Ipswich, who come to Kenilworth Road next Tuesday. The Portman Road crowd saw their team competing in the top three in October, but Ipswich are now 19th, and in danger of emulating Manchester City's disaster of last season.

Two relegation places are all but decided, with Wolves and Notts County seven points below the rest.

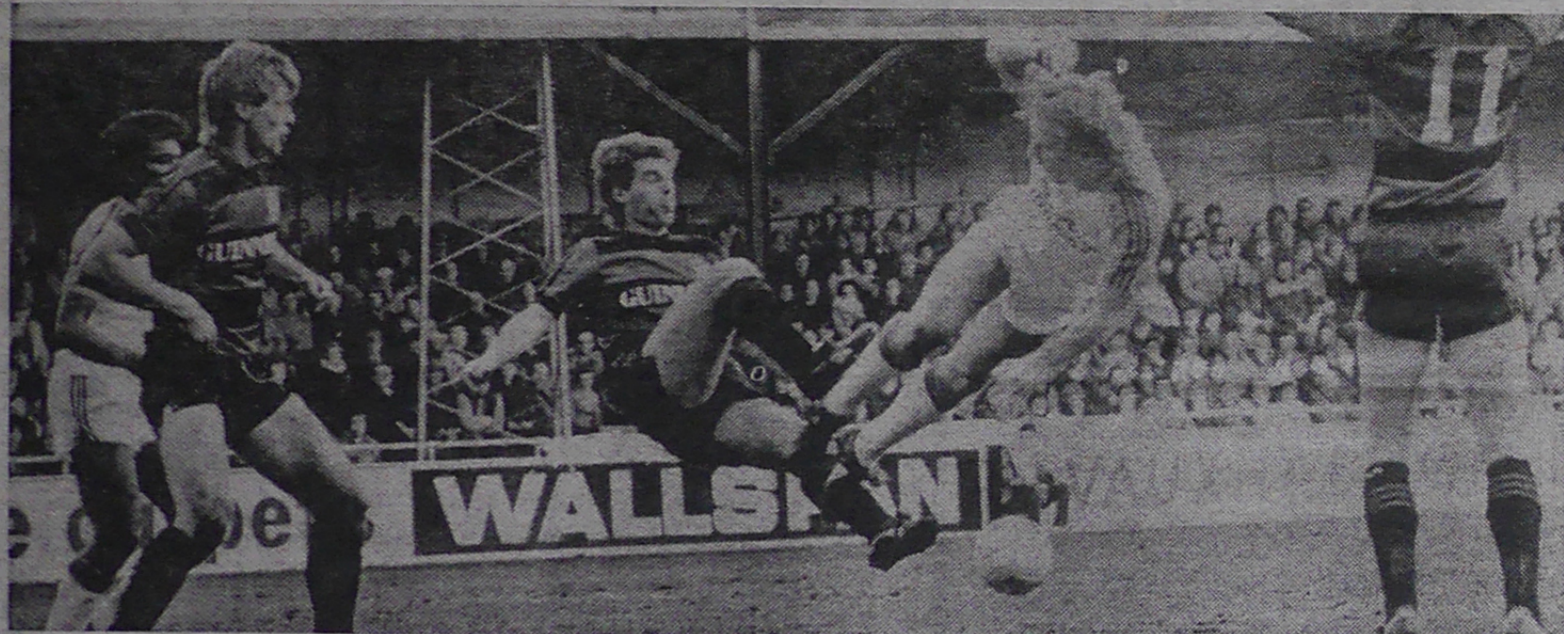
Stoke are third from bottom with 29 points, but only three below Ipswich and four adrift of West Brom.

The table, not including last night's Sunderland v QPR match:

	HOME Goals					AWAY Goals					
	P	W	D	L	F.A.P.	P	W	D	L	F.A.P.	
Liverpool	30	10	3	2	30	4	7	6	18	13	46
Man. Utd	30	10	2	3	31	15	6	8	12	14	52
Nottingham For	30	9	3	3	31	14	7	2	6	20	53
West Ham	30	9	2	3	32	15	7	3	6	17	53
Southampton	29	10	3	2	22	12	5	4	5	15	52
QPR	29	9	3	3	25	9	5	2	7	20	47
Tottenham	30	7	3	5	23	20	5	5	5	24	46
Norwich	30	8	4	3	24	14	3	5	7	11	42
Watford	30	6	4	4	30	26	6	1	9	27	41
Luton	29	5	4	6	24	24	7	1	6	18	41
Aston Villa	29	10	3	3	26	18	1	5	7	17	41
Arsenal	29	5	4	4	22	20	4	2	7	24	39
Coventry	29	5	3	6	19	17	5	4	4	14	31
Birmingham	30	6	2	6	15	13	5	4	7	16	31
Everton	28	5	6	3	12	9	4	4	6	14	27
Leicester	29	7	4	4	27	22	2	4	8	21	35
Sunderland	29	5	7	3	20	14	3	3	8	10	27
WBA	30	4	3	5	18	19	3	3	10	15	30
Ipswich	29	7	2	6	20	20	2	3	9	12	32
Stoke	30	6	3	5	17	18	1	5	10	10	32
Notts. Cnty	29	3	5	8	25	29	2	2	11	14	30
Wolves	29	3	4	7	14	24	2	1	10	9	34



● BEST FOOT FORWARD: Trevor Aylott, back in the side to beef up the attack, tries to get in first as Peter Hucker gathers a cross.



● CROWDED OUT: Paul Walsh launches himself into another attack, but although Ricky Hill is in support Rangers have more than enough cover to protect their clean sheet.