

SOAK-IT-UP PLAN SWEEP ASIDE

FOR a team sitting reasonably comfortably in the middle of the First Division, and with one of the best away records in the league, Luton Town showed an inordinate mixture of respect and fear for the home side at Portman Road.

Ipswich, suffering a crisis of confidence after the break-up of a good team and a plunge into the bottom three, accepted a survival lifeline offered by a wretched Town display.

Portman Road hadn't had a victory to cheer for two months. Ipswich's record since they beat Coventry 3-1 on Paul Mariner's final appearance was seven consecutive defeats followed by a 0-0 home draw with Watford the previous week.

The Town had beaten them with something to spare at Kenilworth Road less than three weeks before, and any performance remotely like the old Luton Town style should have been enough to complete a double.

But they travelled to Ipswich with manager David Pleat forecasting that Ipswich

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

would be fighting so hard that his team would do well to escape defeat.

He had Paul Elliott suspended and 19-year-old Tim Breacker making his debut in midfield. Mal Donaghy returned to defence, and Raddy Antic operated as sweeper for the 48 minutes it took Ipswich to get the goal they deserved on run of play.

"Boring, boring Luton" was one of the chants as the Town spent the first half concentrating all on defence. It was fair comment, because while the Town might claim success in stifling the Ipswich attack they rarely looked like creating anything positive.

Manager David Pleat defended his tactics and his team later. At half-time the Town had survived something of a pounding and had kept the score-sheet blank. He was not unhappy with that.

The hope was that the Town had drawn Ipswich's sting, and could push forward in the second half, using the first 45 minutes as a launching pad for success.

In the Ipswich dressing room at half-time, manager Bobby Ferguson was telling his team that they had

proved they had the measure of Luton and that if they kept it going they couldn't help but win.

He was right, even if it did take a disputed penalty to make the breakthrough.

The Town had conceded the initiative for 45 minutes, and Ipswich were not going to be denied. They looked hungry for success, with more determination than the Town. Ipswich wanted to win and if any neutrals were present they would have thought the Town were the side slipping down the table.

The one success for Town fans who had so little to enjoy was Breacker's debut. He had the strength and determination that was needed and not shown by all of his colleagues. He played simply and sensibly, and produced the Town's only worthwhile shot of the first half, bursting down the middle and lobbing just wide after beating Terry Butcher for pace and strength.

Les Sealey's goal at the other end was under far greater pressure, and but for the goalkeeper the risky policy of contain and wait would have failed long before it did. His best save was to

smother Alan Sunderland when the on-loan striker got clear from George Burley's long through-ball.

The other first-half scare saw Russell Osman's header from a corner beaten out at the second attempt by a massed defence.

The rearguard fought valiantly for a long time, but with Brian Horton unable to stamp authority in midfield, and Paul Walsh and Brian Stein getting precious little service the Town never looked much of an attacking force.

David Moss was kept quiet, and when Frank Bunn replaced him with 23 minutes to go Ipswich already looked like winners, two up and pressing forward against a Town team that seemed to have little self-belief.

Eric Gates, at 28 crafty and cunning as well as intermittently skilful, had a field day in midfield and won the penalty that gave Ipswich the boost they wanted.

Butcher had joined the attack for a long free kick by Mark Brennan, and his flicked header fell to Gates, with Horton in close attendance. The two tumbled, and the Town's protests were in vain as Ray Lewis decided it was a foul.

Gates was Ipswich's penalty-taker in the league for the first time following the departure of John Wark to Liverpool. "I was the natural

successor," he said in a prophetic match programme quote. "After all it was me who earned most of our penalties he scored from..."

Sealey saved the spot kick, but his colleagues had no chance to clear the rebound as Gates swept in to put it into the net.

With Antic pushed up into midfield, the Town at last started to play with a hint of their normal style. Mitchell Thomas helped by getting forward down the left flank, but Ipswich prevented anyone getting close to Paul Cooper's goal.

And the Town's fight ended in the 62nd minute when Thomas was by-passed by a through-ball from Gates. Sunderland went down the right, crossed hard and low across goal, and Trevor Putney came in from the left to shoot the second goal.

A mistake by Goodyear saw another long ball bounce past him in the 75th minute to give Mich D'Avray the third goal, a gift taken with some skill as he lobbed Sealey.

Only in the closing minutes did Ipswich relax their grip. A header by Goodyear from a corner was cleared off the line, and Stein managed a good shot which Cooper saved well. But the closest call was at the other end, with D'Avray's header from a cross by substitute David Barnes clipping the top of the crossbar on its way into the crowd.

For once Mr Pleat did not want to talk too deeply about the game when Pressmen wanted to know why his side had been so much below what they expected. He gave credit to Ipswich, and repeated that he didn't think they will be relegated.

One of the local reporters, crying into his beer later on, agreed that Ipswich might be survivors—if future opponents give them such little worry. With trips to QPR, Anfield and Old Trafford still to come, Ipswich were well pleased with the boost they got from Luton's visit.



● FIRST GOAL: Eric Gates scores after Les Sealey blocked his penalty.