

Town Match Verdict ★★



● STRIKE ONE: Brian Stein darts between two defenders to put the Town ahead at Leicester.

NEW INVESTMENT PAYS FIRST RETURN



● BEST FOOT FORWARD: Mick Harford on his debut.

FOUR very good goals, a debatable penalty missed and an equaliser in stoppage time added up to entertainment as well as a welcome point for the Town at Filbert Street.

Mick Harford, making his Luton debut, headed the late goal that did justice to a Town side which ought to have wrapped up the game in the first half, then took something of a chasing in the early stages of the second.

It was, said manager David Pleat, an "off the cuff" performance from a team still blending together after the introduction of three new men in the last three games.

Match Details

LEICESTER CITY 2 LUTON TOWN 2
HALF-TIME: 0-1

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Turner; Hill, Parker (Thomas, 62 mins), Preece; Stein, Harford, Moss.

LEICESTER: Andrews; Feeley, Bobby Smith, O'Neill, Wilson; Williams, Ramsey, Banks; Lynex, Eastoe, Alan Smith. Sub: Jones, not used.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein for the Town, 35 minutes; Steve Lynex and Alan Smith for Leicester, 52 and 56 minutes; Mick Harford for the Town, 50 seconds into stoppage time.

OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved and ten wide; Leicester four saved and eight, including a penalty by Lynex, wide. Corners: 9-8 to Leicester.

ATTENDANCE: 10,476—much lower than recent gates for this fixture, but the Luton away support is still holding up.

REFEREE: Bob Nixon, Stoke. The penalty award looked dodgy, but he kept the game moving well.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good First Division skill and commitment from both sides, with the Town well on top in the first half and Leicester having the better of most of the second.

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

"I'll sleep easy without worrying about the price too much," said the manager, in a reference to the doubters in football who wondered if £250,000 was not rather a high price to pay for Harford.

On his first 90 minutes—and he was not 100 per cent match fit by First Division standards after a foot operation—Harford has plenty to offer. Few equalisers will be sweeter than his debut goal which gave the Town a point after they had been hit by a two-goal flurry early in the second half.

For the first 45 minutes Leicester were second best by a long way and lucky to be only one down. Harford's height added variety to the Town's attacks, and he was unlucky to be narrowly wide with a couple of chances. David Preece, with a flashing 30-yard drive, forced Ian Andrews to a finger-tip save, but with the Town midfield pressing forward strongly the opening goal was a fair reward for a lot of enterprising play.

It came when Steve Foster, who had a tough physical battle with Alan Smith, was fouled by Peter Eastoe near the half-way line. The skipper hoisted the free kick into the penalty area, Harford outjumped everyone to get a flick-on header, and Brian Stein twisted clear of two defenders and shot carefully into the net.

We had seen hardly anything of Leicester as an attacking force but they were gifted the chance of an equaliser they didn't deserve, three minutes after the Town's goal.

Steve Lynex, later to become the man to turn the game, ran into Harford and referee Bob Nixon gave a penalty. It was, said Mr Pleat later, the only mistake a very good ref made all afternoon. Justice was done when Lynex shot wide from the spot.

Leicester raised their game after the interval, and put more muscle and effort into midfield. Two goals in four minutes turned the game upside down, and Lynex suddenly began to look world class. His pace threatened to destroy the Town's left flank.

With the Town midfield short of tackling power, adventurous ambition was punished twice. First a long diagonal ball from left to right caught everyone out and Lynex raced into empty space. Les Sealey committed himself in a race for the ball outside the box, lost by yards, and was beaten by Lynex's low shot.

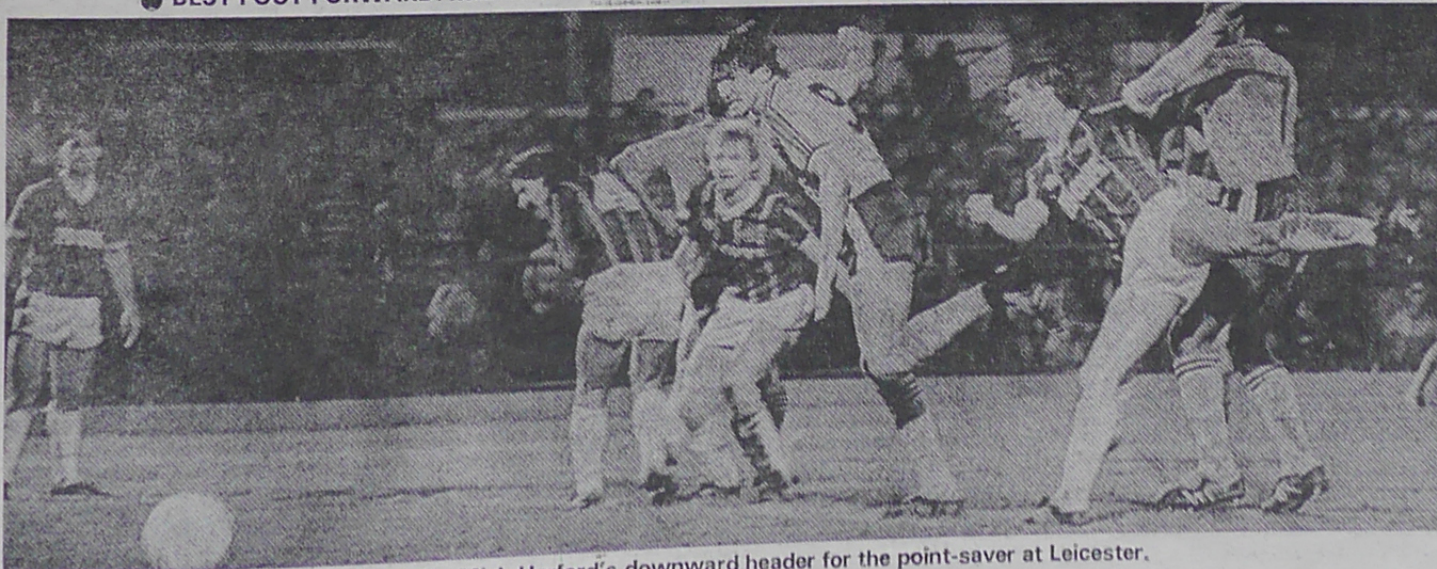
Four minutes later Smith scored a superb solo goal. He collected a pass on the halfway line and outpaced Foster and Donaghy before waiting for Sealey to advance and curling a shot around the goalkeeper.

Yet the Town had never looked unbalanced, and they got back into the game in the last half-hour when the manager made a tactical switch. Garry Parker, unable to find his best form, was taken off, Mitchell Thomas went on as sub at right-back and Ian Breacker moved into midfield.

His muscle and enthusiasm made all the difference and a thoroughly open confrontation got the result it deserved when Breacker made one last foray upfield with 50 seconds of stoppage time gone.

He surged past an attempted tackle, crossed accurately and Harford powered in a bullet header. There had not been a single injury during the whole game, and the Leicester fans' only complaint was that the ref had gone over 90 minutes. He played only five more seconds from the re-start.

"I thought we deserved the point," said Pleat, "particularly as another new man came in and we had hardly had time to work together as a group."



● STRIKE TWO: Mick Harford's downward header for the point-saver at Leicester.

LAST NIGHT'S MATCH REPORT IS IN TODAY'S LUTON LEADER