



84/85
EVERTON RACE HOME

CLOSE CALL: With Everton on the rack in the last ten minutes as the Town pushed forward hungry for an equaliser, David Moss brings Southall to a timely save.

ON THEIR second trip to Merseyside in four days, the Town looked a slightly better side against Everton than they had at Anfield. But they were again second best in just about every department, and defeat left them bottom but one of the First Division again.

Everton, the new Kings of Merseyside, were in no mood to make mistakes as they kept up their challenge to win the league championship for the first time in 15 years.

They needed to win by five goals to go top on goal difference, and might well have done it. Yet, after a lot of rugged defence and solid hard work, the Town might have pinched a point in the last ten minutes when Everton's nerves were stretched.

It would have been an injustice, because Everton's speed and urgency of purpose had given them domination.

Once more Steve Foster held together a defence that was under constant pressure. He and Graeme Sharp fought a physical battle with each other which was just one of the areas where referee Ffrangcon Roberts of Prestatyn failed to control properly.

Foster and Sharp got away with fouls which should have been bookings, and a lot more dubious tackling was not checked. Peter Reid, hard man of midfield, twice left David Preece in a heap after following through with tackles. Nothing was done about it.

The return of Preece in place of Ray Daniel gave the Town a more balanced look in midfield, but the recall of David Moss was less successful.

Mitchell Thomas, at left back, had an unhappy afternoon and Trevor Steven, operating mostly on Everton's

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right as an attacking midfielder, scored both goals for the home side.

He was unmarked in the tenth minute to collect a cross-field diagonal ball from the left by Kevin Sheedy, and gave Les Sealey no chance with a low shot into the far corner.

Everton's game was based on speed and physical power, and the mystery was why they took until the 69th minute to score their second, with another pass by Sheedy creating the opening for Steven to score again.

The Town hardly had a look-in as attackers, while Everton's surging pressure was foiled by good saves by Sealey, some wayward finishing and a little bad luck when Terry Curran hit a post early in the second half.

There was only one serious Town attack in the first half, when Brian Stein did well to burst clear down the left flank and cut in towards goal. But the attempt to score at the near post was a mistake — Neville Southall saved easily when he would have been in trouble if the ball had been pulled back.

Mick Harford's power in the air was the brightest feature of the Town's rare forays forward, and his header ten minutes from time showed that Everton's Welsh international goalkeeper is as human as the next man.

Frank Bunn had been sent on as sub in place of Thomas, and in the last 15 minutes the Town pushed forward with more purpose. The goal came when Wayne Turner, one of several who battled against the odds with real determination, sent over a free-kick towards the edge of the area.

Southall half advanced and Harford floated a header over the goalkeeper into the net.

Three minutes later another cross by Turner induced panic in the Everton defence. Harford won it in the air, Southall failed to hold the ball, and Moss tried to chip the 'keeper from three or four yards. But Southall made a brilliant recovery and saved.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of both New Year matches was to hear the Northern Press debate the great Luton mystery. In the previous two seasons the Town had won a lot of friends on their travels with their style and enterprising spirit. The latest trips avoided hammerings, but left a lot of observers disappointed at the tactical approach.

To defend in depth and look for something on the break you need to be very sharp on counter-attacks.

Liverpool and Everton were both able to fire off a lot more shots at goal than the Town, and the pop-gun relativity never looked like being a hit.

MATCH DETAILS

EVERTON: Southall; Bailey, Ratcliffe, Mountfield, Van den Hauwe; Steven, Reid; Bracewell, Sheedy; Curran, Sharp. Sub: Atkins, not needed.
TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas (Bunn, 67 minutes); Hill, Turner, Preece; Stein, Harford, Moss.

THE GOALS: Trevor Steven twice for Everton, 10 and 69 minutes; Mick Harford for the Town, 80 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved and one wide; Everton seven saved, one hit a post and eight wide. Corners: 12-2 to Everton.

REFEREE: Ffrangcon Roberts, Prestatyn—a primary school headmaster who was not apparently too concerned about discipline on the field.

ATTENDANCE: 31,682—nearly all Evertonians who expected to see their team crush the Town to go on top of the league.

ENTERTAINMENT: Probably a good game of football for home or neutral fans, with Everton creating and missing a lot of chances. It was agony to watch through Luton eyes.