

SPORT AND MOTORING

Town Match Verdict ★★★★★

DOUBLE DELIGHT PEPS UP RELEGATION FIGHT



A VISITING team short of ambition and pre-occupied with defence enabled the Town to get the victory they needed at Kenilworth Road on Saturday to give a hint that the relegation fight can yet be won.

Two superb headed goals by Mick Harford were the very least the Town deserved for over-running Queens Park Rangers. The visitors were near to receiving the thrashing that Town boss David Pleat forecast his men would dish out before long.

It might come this week, although 21st-placed Ipswich must surely be more adventurous and positive than Rangers were.

'TRYING TO BE POSITIVE'

Acting manager Frank Sibley—and who could blame him for refusing to take the job permanently?—strained the imagination a little when he spoke after the match of the positive tactics he had tried to employ.

Rangers had failed to score in their previous five away games in league and cup, yet they lined up against the Town with John Gregory, a useful attacking man, playing as sweeper.

Sibley had been unlucky—Steve Wicks went down with an Achilles tendon injury on the day of the match, and his other recognised centre-half, Terry Fenwick, was suspended.

Inexperienced Alan McDonald struggled to mark Harford, who showed into space at will, and Robbie James, on his 28th birthday, was taken out of attack and turned into an emergency centre-half.

Mr Sibley said that he was playing three men at the back, with his full-backs pushing up on the flanks.

But he admitted that the



● ON ITS WAY: Mick Harford rises to a corner from David Preece . . .

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

Rangers, in danger of slipping into the relegation battle themselves, were swept aside by a Town team that enjoyed the confidence that comes from being a lot too good for the opposition.

There was still the little matter of not getting the goals so much possession and pressure should have brought, but a string of 2-0 victories like this for the rest of the season would cause no complaints.

There still seems to be a doubt in the manager's mind about his best formation in midfield and attack. He recalled Meka Nwajobi in place of Garry Parker, and was rewarded with a lot of good touches and a little exasperation when final passes were not quite right.

Stein was playing like a hombful of talent waiting for the right fuse, and missed a golden chance to score in first-half injury time when he won a penalty but hit it near enough to Peter Hucker for the goalkeeper to be able to make a good save.

Rangers thought that penalty award—only the second the Town have had this sea-

son—was harsh, after James and Stein had tried to turn each other on the edge of the box.

But they had no real complaints about the goals that settled it as Harford ended a six-game goal famine.

Nwajobi made the first, in the 19th minute, collecting an astute diagonal pass from Nicholas and going down the left wing on a run which took him past Gary Chivers. The cross was delivered perfectly and Harford's powerful header was just as good.

The big striker nearly repeated it a few minutes later with a flashing header just wide of the near post after a clever run, turn and cross by Stein.

Rangers took a pounding as the Town swarmed on to constant attack, and they were lucky when Nwajobi repeated his left-wing agility

and crossed for Hill to power a header against the bar.

The penalty miss came late in the first half, and at half-time Sibley told his men they had got the chance to build on that stroke of good luck and rescue a point.

They tried, but willingness soon evaporated after a promising Rangers spell of 10 or 15 minutes showed no real sign of discomforting Sealey.

Harford's majestic header from Preece's left-wing corner made the Town's first double of the season a formality, and at one stage even Gary Waddock of Rangers joined in the applause for a neat ball control demonstration by Hill.

Preece gave the Town attacking width down the left, and in my book shared the man of the match honours with Harford. He instigated a superb move that was

worth a goal: his long cross was headed back across goal by Foster. Stein headed the ball towards Foster again and up popped Nwajobi to head into the net. He was given offside.

Rangers all but gave up, and Donaghy and Foster both joined the attacks, with the Irishman having a shot blocked by Hucker and his skipper poking the rebound over the unguarded net.

Perhaps they will be goals "in the bank" for the next two important games, at home to Ipswich and away to Southampton on Tuesday.



● IN THE NET: The scene a split second after the picture on the left was taken, with Peter Hucker beaten as the Town go two up.

● HEADS YOU LOSE: Meka Nwajobi finds space for a second-half header that looked as though it had put the Town three up. Preece, Foster and Stein worked the ball back and forth across the goalmouth to create the opening, but Nwajobi was given offside.

It would have been a London treble for the Nigerian—he has scored two league goals in the First Division so far this season, one in the 2-2 draw at home to Spurs and the other against West Ham, when it was also 2-2.

The empty spaces in the Bobbers Stand are not a return to the old days of standing room only on that side of the ground—Luton Town FC is still working to replace the seats torn out by hooligans at the Millwall cup-tie.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 QPR 0

HALF-TIME 1-0

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Nwajobi, Stein, Harford. Sub: Moss, not needed.

RANGERS: Hucker; Chivers, McDonald, James, Gregory, Dawes; Waddock, Fillery, Fereday; Bannister, Byrne (Martin Allen, 66 minutes).

THE GOALS: Mick Harford with two superb headers, from a run and cross by Meka Nwajobi in the 19th minute and from a corner by David Preece in the 61st minute.

OTHER STRIKES: Town seven saved, including a penalty by Brian Stein, nine off target, one hit the bar and one netted by Nwajobi but ruled out for offside. Rangers three saved and three wide. Corners: 8-1 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 9,373, with only a handful travelling from London. Town officials were happy enough after the damage Millwall did to the reputation of the club and the game.

REFEREE: Dennis Hedges, Oxford—Rangers felt he was more than harsh when he gave the Town a penalty in the 44th minute for a challenge by Robbie James on Brian Stein.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not a classic and Rangers were very poor opposition, but the result and the hope it gives in the relegation fight made it a very happy day for Town fans.

League table looks a little more hopeful

THE victory over QPR lifted the Town one place in the Canon League First Division, and although they are still four points adrift of the safety line they still have to play the other four teams in the bottom five.

They could even be out of the bottom three by this time next week—if they beat Ipswich at Kenilworth Road on Saturday and follow that with a victory at Southampton on Tuesday.

Bottom club Stoke have little hope of escaping the drop. They scored their first league goal since Boxing Day to take the lead against Nottingham Forest, but were then hit by a four-goal reply.

Ipswich dropped below the Town because they were held to a 1-1 draw at home by Newcastle, and that was probably the best result from the Town's point of view, with two endangered teams each dropping two points.

The Town wanted Watford to do them a good turn by winning at Highfield Road, but Coventry produced their third victory in four games to move up to 18th.

Watford and Sunderland are level on 34 points with Coventry, five points above the Town.

The surprise strugglers are West Ham, who were fifth in the table when they came to Kenilworth Road and drew 2-2 in November.

They have won only once in their 12 league outings since then, and this week's single-goal defeat at Leicester saw them drop to 19th place, although they

THE FIRST DIVISION

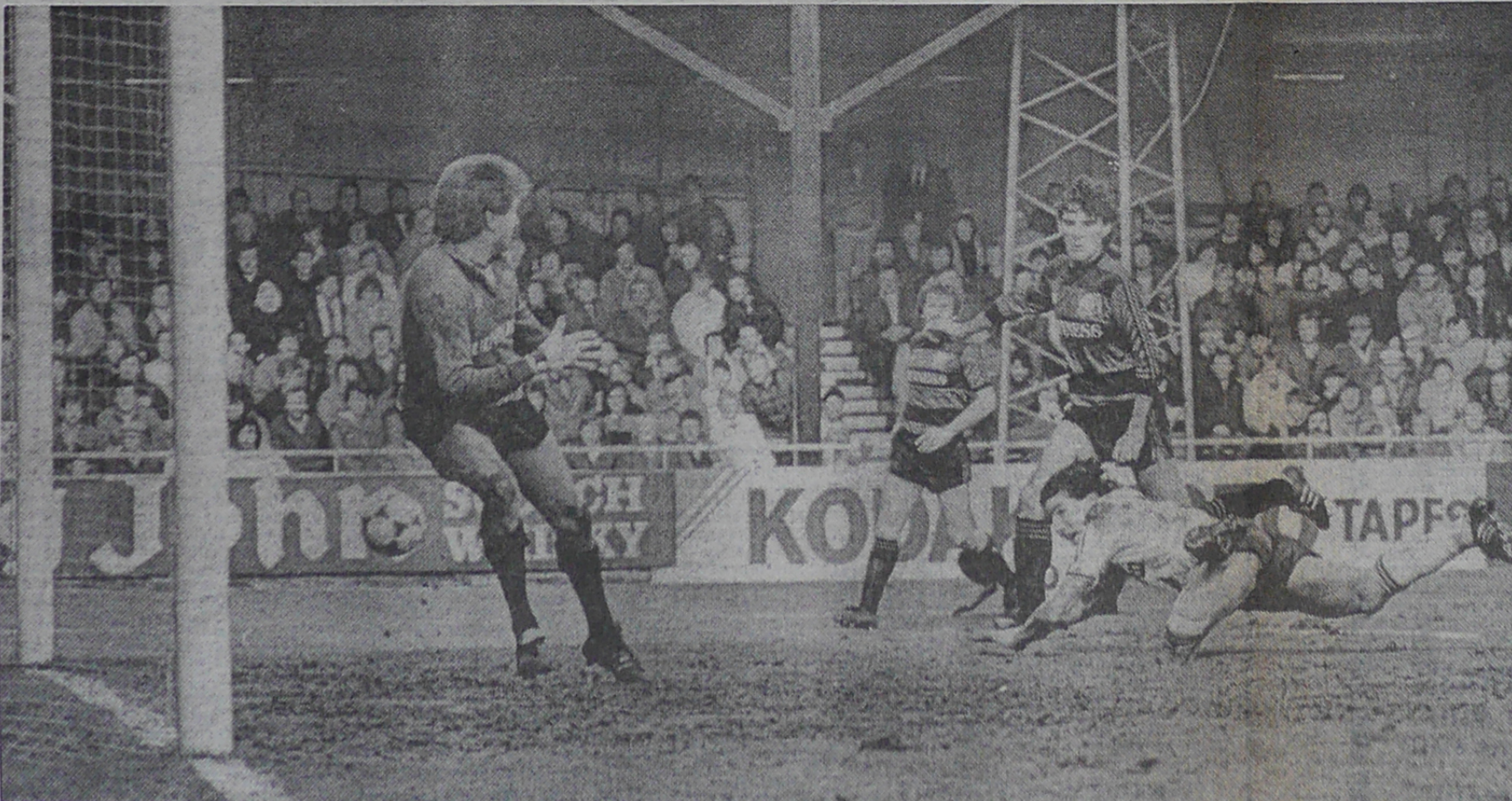
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Everton	29	18	6	5	63	32	60
Spurs	30	18	6	6	50	30	60
Man Utd	31	16	8	7	59	35	56
Arsenal	33	15	7	11	51	40	52
Liverpool	36	14	9	7	42	24	51
N. Forest	31	15	5	11	46	38	50
South'lon	31	14	8	9	41	34	50
Sheff Wed	30	12	12	6	44	36	48
Chelsea	30	11	10	9	45	36	43
Leicester	31	12	6	13	51	52	42
A. Villa	31	10	10	11	42	48	40
West Brom	31	11	6	14	42	49	39
Norwich	29	10	8	11	36	42	38
Newcastle	27	9	11	12	58	58	38
QPR	32	9	11	12	38	52	38
Watford	30	8	10	12	53	57	34
Sunderland	29	7	14	15	41	54	34
Coventry	30	10	4	16	34	49	34
West Ham	28	8	9	11	35	42	33
Luton Town	29	7	14	14	51	51	29
Ipswich	28	6	5	13	26	40	27
Stoke	30	2	8	20	18	60	14

● Not including Villa v Stoke last night.

● Saturday's delight fixtures: Luton v Ipswich; Norwich v Coventry; Nottingham Forest v West Ham; QPR v Watford; Stoke v Arsenal; Sunderland v Chelsea.

have games in hand on the other lowly clubs.

They also have a better goal difference figure than most of the other strugglers: minus seven compared to Stoke's -42, Ipswich's -14, the Town's -17 and Coventry's -15.



● SO NEAR: Mick Harford was close to a hat-trick of headers. This one beat Peter Hucker, but flashed wide of the post.



● ACTION MAN: David Preece, at 5ft 5in the smallest man on the field, shows how to rise above the opposition.