

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 ghosted 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

tactics, with Wayne Fereday and Micky Fillery outgunned in midfield by Peter Nicholas, David Preece and Ricky Hill, had been brushed aside by a Luton team that was better on the day, and deserved victory for their first double of the season.

There was only one short period when the Town looked as though they might lose their composure—early in the second half when Rangers, only one down, started to get Ian Dawes, the left back, into attacking positions.

But Tim Breacker, Steve Foster, Mal Donaghy and Mitchell Thomas showed the class that Rangers lacked, and by the final whistle Les Sealey had not been asked to make a single serious save.

Donaghy had Garry Bannister in his pocket, and poor John Byrne, still finding his feet in the First Division after a transfer from York, had a miserable afternoon, culminating in an early departure to allow the sub to try his luck.

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 Nwajiobi 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 bombful 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 Hücker 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.

Nwajiobi 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 Nwajiobi 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 Nwajiobi 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 Hücker 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.



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

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 QPR 0

HALF-TIME: 1-0

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

RANGERS: Hücker; 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 Nwajiobi 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 Nwajiobi 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.