

Ipswich are 'butchered' after an early scare

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THE second victory on the trot—the first time they have managed that this season—gave the Town real hope of pulling off a successful late run to avoid relegation.

Mick Harford, the £250,000 bargain, helped himself to two more goals to ensure success in a match the Town had to win, against one of the only two teams below them in the league table.

But Ipswich, whose only away victory of the season had been against bottom club Stoke, caused plenty of problems at Kenilworth Road on Saturday before the Town punished them for missing early chances.

"They were giving us a beating," admitted manager David Pleat. "They almost humiliated us in the first 20 minutes."

That was how long the Town took to settle into a pattern, and they were lucky to be only one down to a crisp 20-yard drive by Eric Gates in the 18th minute after the Town had failed to clear a corner.

Trevor Putney, Romeo Zondervan and Gates all made incisive passes to set up clear openings, but Kevin Wilson missed three, Les Sealey saved a header from Mich D'Avray and Putney was also foiled by the goalkeeper.

Harford had hit the bar from a corner before Gates scored, but the reverse shook the Town out of a lethargic spell.

Ricky Hill, Peter Nicholas and David

Preece won control of midfield, Brian Stein dropped back behind Harford and Meka Nwajiobi, and Ipswich were simply swept aside.

Harford reduced England centre-half Terry Butcher to a bundle of nerves, while Steve Foster strolled imperiously through his potential problems.

A booking would have put him out of the semi-final at Villa Park. He took no chances, left D'Avray looking like a boy playing against a giant, and marshalled a defence that rarely looked in trouble after that early spell.

The only complaint was that Ipswich might have been buried under an avalanche of goals. Long before the end they were dispirited and ineffective.

They were vulnerable down both flanks, and to the quick through-ball played between Butcher and Russell Osman, and at different times every Town player spotted the chance to put on the pressure with telling passes.

Nwajiobi, Stein, sub Ray Daniel and even Mal Donaghy all got through on openings that should have produced goals, but failed to find the finishing touch.

It hardly mattered against Ipswich. Paul Cooper made some good saves for them, but dropped a clanger to give the Town their 30th-minute equaliser.

Stein had sent Preece away down the left wing, and Cooper tried to reach the far-post cross. He missed completely, and

Harford nodded in his seventh goal for the Town.

Just before the interval Tim Breacker attacked down the right, Stein helped his pass goalwards and Nwajiobi, with an instinctive toe-poke, put the Town ahead.

He had to go off with stomach cramp later on, and Ipswich must have been glad to see the back of him, because his through-ball brought the third goal in the 66th minute.

Butcher stumbled as the pass was played, Harford raced through on his own and cracked in the killer goal from the edge of the penalty area.

In the closing minutes Ipswich took a pounding, with Daniel nearly getting the Town's fourth—he raced clear on Preece's through-pass, left the defence spreadeagled, rounded Cooper and then saw Butcher get back in time to head the shot off the line.

LUTON TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Nwajiobi (Daniel 81 mins), Stein, Harford.

IPSWICH: Cooper; Burley, Osman, Butcher, Gernon; Zondervan, Brennan, Gates, Putney (Dozzell, 51 mins); D'Avray, Wilson.

THE GOALS: Eric Gates for Ipswich, 18 mins; Mick Harford two for the Town, 30 and 66 mins; Meka Nwajiobi for the Town, 43 mins.

OTHER STRIKES: Town ten saved, seven wide, two hit the woodwork; Ipswich four saved, nine wide. Corners: 10-4 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 12,640, boosted by cup-tie ticket vouchers being on offer to 3,000 more than for the corresponding game last season.

REFEREE: David Letts, Basingstoke — kept the game flowing but might have been firmer with some of the Ipswich tackling.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very good once the Town got a grip after Ipswich had threatened to over-run them in the first 20 minutes. If they had a Ricky Hill in their side it might have been a different result.