

STOKING UP A CUP-TIE DREAM

THE best away win since David Pleat became manager of Luton Town edged relegation fears a little into the background as the team enjoyed their last outing before Saturday's big test at Villa Park.

Bottom club Stoke City were the hapless victims of a bank holiday treat for the Town fans who made the journey to the Victoria ground.

The fixture was arranged at short notice when Coventry's Easter programme, at home to the Town and away to Stoke, was knocked out by a flu bug.

The win—the Town's first 4-0 away success since a trip to Notts County in November 1976—pushed the Town out of the bottom three for the first time since Christmas and perhaps Stoke did the Town a cup semi-final favour by making themselves available as a sort of training punch-bag before the big fight.

The home side, with only three wins in their previous 33 league games, were so

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

awful that the tiny attendance was either drifting away long before the end, or staying to shout abuse at players and directors.

Stoke, smashed 0-5 by Manchester United two days ago, has lost heart, directors say manager Bill Asprey can't have money to rebuild, and the fans are disillusioned.

Fading stars like Alan Hudson, Sammy McIlroy, Mark Chamberlain and Keith Bertschin were simply not good enough to match a weakened Town side looking for its first away win in six months.

Skipper Steve Foster was rested to allow a slight thigh strain to clear up before Saturday's Villa Park trip, and Peter Nicholas stepped in to partner Mal Donaghy.

Wayne Turner returned to midfield, and with the centre of the pitch mudbound the Town made best use of the firmer parts, on the flanks.

The early departure of Ricky Hill, injured during the first half, put a cloud over the Villa Park dreams,

but enabled David Moss to make his first appearance since the cup-tie on the same ground in January and he looked a class better than he has done as a reserve player at Kenilworth Road on Friday.

While former England winger Chamberlain made the mistake of trying to plod through the mud down the middle, the Town got Moss, Brian Stein and Meka Nwajobi moving in wide earlier, are broke. The team positions, and Stoke were all but swamped.

SATISFIED

Paul Dyson and Alan Dodd found it impossible to hold Mick Harford in the air or on the ground, and the only complaint Mr Pleat after the game was that the Town should have been more ruthless and done more to improve their goal difference figure. Even so, four up with more than 20 minutes to go, the Town had more than satisfied their fans.

Stoke hardly had a serious goal attempt, and when they did get close Les Sealey dealt with everything. He even rushed out once to sweep up outside the area and calmly beat an opponent in a quick dribble before clearing.

Everton manager Howard Kendall sat in the stand to watch 80 minutes of the game, and probably learned very little more than he knew before kick-off.

He will be glad that Nicholas and David Preece will be unable to play on Saturday. Both had excellent games, with Preece adept at turning defence into attack.

Hill's thigh injury in the 30th minute, and departure ten minutes later after an unsuccessful attempt to run it off, hardly mattered in terms of destroying Stoke. They never knew who to expect on raids down the wings, and even sub-standard crosses had Dyson and Dodd in trouble.

The first illustration of

that came in the 17th minute. The Town had played some attractive early football, with Siddall doing well to beat out a sharp drive by Stein from the left.

He made a run down the right to collect an astute pass by Harford, who had surged through the middle, and all seemed lost when Stein's attempt to pull the ball back to Harford failed. Dyson collected, tried to pass back to Siddall, failed to make the pass positively and Harford nipped in to poke the ball under the goal-keeper.

Stoke's attacking threats were contained with ease, and with fans jeering some inept approach work the home side gave up 90 seconds into the second half. Moss's corner from the right produced a scramble at the near post, and although Stein was unable to force the ball home Harford's instinct for the half-chance gave him his second goal, and his third double in the last four games.

He might have had four goals. Mitchell Thomas and Moss combined to open up the defence again, with Harford's far post header being blocked by Siddall, and the keeper did well to deal with a 20-yard piledriver from the centre-forward who has now scored one more than Andy Gray, his Everton counterpart.

ENJOYED

Moss could hardly have had a more friendly opposition to enjoy his return to the First Division, and his 64th-minute goal revived memories of the expert craftsman at his best.

Stein, so willing and patient as a provider of chances, sliced open Stoke's right flank with a pass between two defenders inviting Moss to have a go. The 33-year-old legs were too quick for Steve Bould, who is ten years younger, and the angled shot low past Siddall was perfection.

The best pass of the match brought the fourth goal in the 68th minute. Preece delivered it, 30 yards or more from the left side of midfield towards the right



● MOSSY IS BACK . . . and the winger acknowledges the chant of the fans by celebrating his first goal in five months.

wing. Meka Nwajobi, who did not seem to relish the conditions too much, enjoyed the opportunity to run at Chris Maskery from outside the box. He drifted past the defender, waited for the exposed Siddall to start to advance, then cracked in his fifth goal of the season.

It was all too easy, with Stoke knowing they have lost a season's hopes, never mind one match at a time. The refreshing thing for Town fans was that even bottom teams can produce shocks, so why shouldn't Luton upset the formbook against top team Everton.

For all their troubles Stoke had not been beaten by four goals at home all season. And they had managed to beat Arsenal and Manchester United on the ground where Luton Town were a mile ahead in class, commitment and confidence.

Match Details

STOKE CITY 0, LUTON TOWN 4

HALF-TIME: 0-1

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Nicholas, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill (Moss, 40 mins), Turner, Preece; Nwajobi, Stein, Harford, Stoke; Siddall; Bould, Dodd, Dyson, Maskery; Painter, Hudson, McIlroy, Heath; Bertschin, Chamberlain. Sub: Parkin, spared humiliation . . . was not sent on.

THE GOALS: Mick Harford two, his second double in four games, 17 and 47 mins; David Moss 64 mins; Meka Nwajobi 68 mins.

OTHER STRIKERS: Stoke five saved and five wide; Town ten saved and four wide. Corners: 5-4 to Stoke.

ATTENDANCE: 6,951, Stoke's second-lowest league gate of the season, on a wet and windy bank holiday afternoon.

REFEREE: Ian Hendrick, Leicester—not brilliant, but didn't need to be. ENTERTAINMENT: The Town following enjoyed it immensely, but Stoke, bottom and already accepting their relegation fate, were awful. Even their chairman said he was ashamed of their performance. They had lost 0-5 at Old Trafford on Saturday.

COVENTRY: Five home—Sunderland, W Brom, Liverpool, Everton, Luton, six away—Stoke, Not Forest, Spurs, Southampton, Newcastle, Ipswich.

SUNDERLAND: Four home—West Ham, Aston Villa, Ipswich, Sheff Wed, four away—Coventry, Man Utd, Leicester, West Brom.

IPSWICH: Six home—Liverpool, Stoke, Sheff Wed, West Ham, Leicester, Coventry, four away—Spurs, Southampton, Sunderland, Watford.

WEST HAM: Five home—Luton, Liverpool, Norwich, Chelsea, Stoke, five away—Sunderland, West Brom, Sheff Wed, Ipswich, Everton.

WATFORD: Five home—Stoke, West Brom, Norwich, Man Utd, Ipswich, four away—Liverpool, Not Forest, Spurs, Aston Villa.

It looks as though 50 points will be enough to stave off relegation, with 49 possibly sufficient.

If Stoke are dead, Coventry look pretty sick—they are the only one of the struggling clubs with more away games than home to be played and only Stoke have a worse away record than theirs in the First Division.

And with Luton, Sunderland, Liverpool and Everton among their last five home games Coventry could be well under 48 points by the season's end.

Sunderland are the other favourites to go down, and will have a significant say in the final scrap, with games at home to Ipswich and away to Coventry likely to be crucial.

West Ham are also in danger, and they also have to play Sunderland, at Roker Park, and will have to improve drastically on recent form to reach 50 points.

● EVERYBODY UP: Luckless Stoke goalkeeper Barry Siddall hardly knew who would be next as the Town roared to their best away win for nine years. This time it's defender Mal Donaghy joining the fun for an attempt at goal.

Escape hopes given boost

THE THIRD and fourth goals at Stoke lifted the Town out of the bottom three of the First Division.

They kicked off in 21st place, but rose two places by overtaking non-playing Coventry and edging ahead of Sunderland on goal difference.

That was because Sunderland, whose goal difference was two goals better than the Town's, were held to a 0-0 draw at home by Newcastle while the Town were improving their goals figure by four.

The Town also have two games in hand over Sunderland. And although Coventry are only one point behind, with one game in hand, the Town can cancel that out by winning at Highfield Road later in the season.

Ipswich are making a determined bid for safety—they have won three on the trot after their defeat at Kenilworth Road to move a point above the Town.

The indications are that the relegation battle could last until the final week of the season probably until after the FA Cup Final. Stoke are as good as certain to go down, and the scrap for the other two unwanted relegation places covers six other teams, the Town and Watford both included.

The bottom places in the First Division after the Easter games:

Watford	33	9	11	13	59	40	38
West Ham	32	9	10	13	40	53	37
Ipswich	32	9	14	12	44	36	36
Luton Town	32	9	8	15	41	53	35
Sunderland	34	9	17	16	50	35	35
Coventry	31	10	4	17	35	51	34
Stoke	4	3	8	23	20	71	17

Fixtures of the clubs involved:
LUTON TOWN: Six home—Norwich, Man Utd, Arsenal, Leicester, Not Forest, Everton, four away—Chelsea, West Ham, Aston Villa, Coventry.



● FOUR UP: Meka Nwajobi hammers in his fifth goal of the season.