

Town Match Verdict ★★

Town hit in dying minutes

AFTER the huge delight of a last-minute win over Manchester United three days earlier, the Town were on the other end of a late drama at Kenilworth Road last night. Nottingham Forest pinched a victory to leave the Hatters still embroiled in the First Division's relegation dogfight.

You had to feel sorry for the Town. In boxing terms they were put down for an early count, got up to draw level, forged into a long points lead, then lost to a sucker-punch knockout blow seconds before the last bell.

The sympathy for a tremendous attacking effort was tempered by the disappointment that for all the pressure Forest goalkeeper Hans Segers had hardly any serious saves to make while the Town enjoyed almost all the possession in the second half.

Forest, chasing a place in Europe on resources not much fatter than the Town's, defended superbly in depth, and showed real class in their counter-attacks, rare though they were.

Even an enforced change for the last half hour, when Chris Fairclough went off injured and sub Gary Birtles replaced him in central defence, failed to shake a grimly determined defence.

Forest made it clear that they would be happy with a point, and the disaster for the Town was that if they had broken through to take the lead there is little doubt that they could have helped themselves to the fourth consecutive league victory they sought.

Forest had the bonus of a goal in their first attack. Gary Mills started it, collecting a pass from 19-year-old Nigel Clough, son of the Forest manager, and attacking down the Town's left.

The Town were caught stretched because they had pushed upfield for a set-piece long throw-in by Peter Nicholas, then lost possession. Mills tried to find Peter Davenport in the middle. Steve Foster made a blocking tackle and the ball ran loose for Mills to follow up with a low shot into the far corner from the edge of the penalty area.

Wayne Turner replaced the suspended Mitchell Thomas at left back, and got over the shock of that early goal to play with tremendous grit and determination.

Foster kept the dangerous Davenport quiet as Forest settled into a 4-4-2 formation, pulling men back when danger

BRIAN SWAIN reports on Luton Town's match against Nottingham Forest last night. Action pictures by MARK RICHARDS

threatened, which was most of the time, and breaking quickly with Mills and Steve Hodge motoring down the flanks and Johnny Metgod trying some astute passes.

But with Nicholas tackling solidly and David Preece backing up attacks down the left behind David Moss, the Town took the game to Forest and seemed to be set for three points when the equaliser arrived in the 18th minute.

Ricky Hill ran at the defence to collect a pass from Nicholas, Fairclough brought him down and Moss converted the Town's third penalty in consecutive games.

For the rest of the first half it was a spirited even contest, with Nicholas hammering two thundering drives just wide and the Forest defence scrambling desperately to keep out a close-range thrust by Preece and Brian Stein.

At the other end Hodge got clear twice but wasted the chances to provide good centres, and when Clough fed Davenport for a run at goal Turner made a vital tackle.

The Town spent most of the second half storming an overcrowded Oak Road end penalty area. Jim McNally headed off the line from Mick Harford, Segers made a couple of competent saves from 20-yard drives by Preece and Nicholas.

But most of the shots cannoned off bodies and legs and when a clear opening did arrive, in the 85th minute, Moss was unable to deliver the finishing touch from two yards after Hill's back-header from Preece's corner had bamboozled Segers and his colleagues.

Only twice in the whole of the second half did Forest threaten the Town goal. In the 73rd minute Les Sealey dived to make a good save from Metgod's free-kick, but in the final minute Sealey was left without cover when Metgod broke from defence with the ball.

Mal Donaghy hoped in vain for off-side, Metgod went past him, drew Sealey and passed for Hodge to tap the winner into an empty net.



● MISSED IT! David Moss sees the ball go the wrong side of the post five minutes from time.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1 NOTT'M FOREST 2
HALF-TIME: 1-1

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Turner; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Stein, Harford, Moss. Sub: Parker, not used.

FOREST: Segers; McNally, Fairclough (Birtles, 60 mins), Hart, Swain; Mills, Bowyer, Metgod, Hodge; Davenport, Clough.

THE GOALS: Gary Mills for Forest in the third minute; David Moss penalty for the Town, 18 mins, after Ricky Hill had been fouled by Fairclough; Steve Hodge for Forest, in the last minute, with over-anxious Town caught stretched for the counter-punch.

OTHER STRIKES: Town nine saved (mostly by defenders, not the goalkeeper) and ten wide; Forest two saved and four wide. Corners: 6-2 to the Town.

REFEREE: Brian Hill, Kettering; had a pretty good game.

ENTERTAINMENT: Like the Town's performance, all right except for the finishing flourish being absent. Forest defended brilliantly.

ATTENDANCE: 10,156. That won't keep the grass growing at Kenilworth Road.

Crunch set up for Upton Park

LAST night's soccer leaves the Town and West Ham, who meet at Upton Park on Saturday, level on points and in the relegation danger zone.

While the Town were losing, Norwich pulled ahead with a 3-2 win at Stoke, who are now relegated.

But there was one result in the Town's favour: Sunderland, who have managed only one victory, at Coventry, in eight games since they appeared at Wembley in the Milk Cup final, lost again, by the only goal at West Brom.

All the other endangered teams have games in hand over the Wearsiders, and Sunderland look favourites with Coventry to accompany Stoke into the Second Division.

Oxford United are the first team to be sure of making the journey in the opposite direction after beating Shrewsbury.

Manager David Pleat has mixed news as he prepares for the important West Ham match. Mitchell Thomas can come back after suspension, and Meka

RELEGATION FIGHTERS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Walsford	36	11	12	13	45	42	45
Leicester	36	13	4	19	59	45	45
Norwich	37	12	9	16	44	58	45
Newcastle	38	11	12	15	50	66	45
Ipswich	36	11	9	16	39	51	42
Luton Tn.	35	11	8	16	47	57	41
West Ham	34	10	11	13	42	54	41
Sunderland	38	10	9	19	37	52	39
Coventry	34	11	4	19	36	54	37
Stoke	36	3	8	25	22	76	17

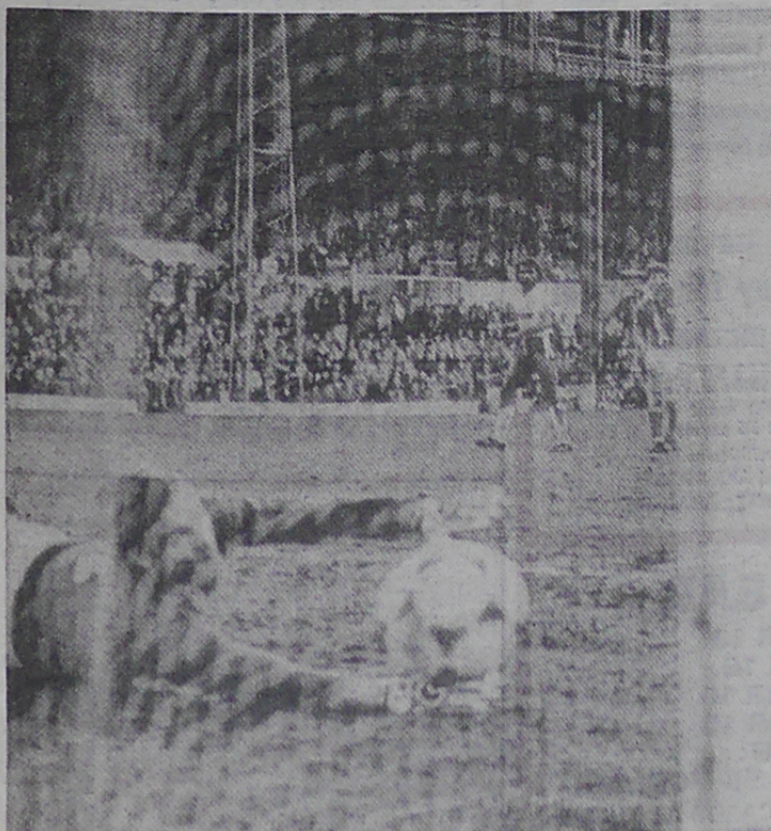
Nwajioji hopes to shake off the hamstring injury which forced him out of last night's game.

But leading scorer Mick Harford will miss the Upton Park game—he is suspended after passing 21 disciplinary points with a booking in the FA Cup semi-final. He collected another caution last night, for a foul on Ian Bowyer.

How the Hatters beat United—Brian Swain's report plus pictures in this week's Luton News

ALSO

Revolutionary new changes in the air at Kenilworth Road



● GOT IT! Moss steers his penalty past the despairing dive of Hans Segers.