

Town hit in dying minutes

84/85

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

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

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.