

EXTRA GRIT WINS IT FOR CHELSEA

HAVING half-secured their First Division place with holiday weekend success, Luton Town fell well short of recent standards at Stamford Bridge last night. Chelsea, slightly the better of two teams who struggled on a boggy pitch that had been over-watered, just about deserved to win.

It was poor entertainment for the fans, with the Town unable to get into gear. Ricky Hill, David Preece and Meka Nwajiobi were all missing, but should be back for the final Saturday home game of the season, against Leicester on Saturday.

Three points against Leicester will end the last lingering fear of relegation.

The Town will do it with something to spare if they show the determination and attacking skills that destroyed Arsenal 3-1 at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

They are just as certain to be winners if the defence can buckle down as effectively as they did at Villa Park, when skipper Steve Foster and his men defended the lead snatched by Brian Stein in the 21st minute.

At Chelsea the defence played reasonably well, but the reorganised midfield and attack rarely got together to fashion dangerous attacks and Eddie Niedzwiecki did not have a difficult shot to save.

Les Sealey was not exactly overworked either, but Chelsea showed the more determination to win, even if the two-goal result flattered them a little.

Both teams suffered on a dreadful pitch, with even Chelsea officials admitting that they had overdone it when they decided to take the hardness out of the

REPORT by BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

ground. The hosepipe was left running for too long, and the bog in midfield made smart passing almost impossible.

Chelsea were looking for points to sustain a bid to qualify for Europe, and on last night's evidence will frighten the continentals little more than Norwich.

Power

But they produced the one moment of clean finishing that just about settled the game, with Kerry Dixon's aerial power giving him his 36th goal of the season.

There had been 26 minutes of uninteresting stalemate when Pat Nevin won a corner on Chelsea's left off Mal Donaghy. The Town half-cleared it, the ball went back to Nevin, and his cross to the far post was met by Dixon's leap and accurate angled header.

Questions might be asked about a defence beaten at a set-piece again, but Dixon deserved his goal even though Steve Foster

allowed him no other clear chances.

There were precious few opportunities at the other end either, with Frank Bunn, Mick Harford and Brian Stein unable to break through and rarely getting the sort of service they might have thrived on.

Peter Nicholas and Wayne Turner tackled willingly enough in midfield, but too often passes were held up by the mud, and Garry Parker, like many others, found the heavy conditions difficult to cope with.

Nigel Spackman looked the most dangerous midfielder, but Chelsea's flank attacks were mostly held up by the hard work of Tim Breacker and Mitchell Thomas.

The Town's problem was that they created so few chances you could not anticipate any real threat to the Chelsea goal, while the home side tried their luck



● MINE! Wayne Turner, supported by Frank Bunn, dispossesses Micky Thomas.

from any range and angle.

Les Sealey dived to scoop a cross-shot by Micky Thomas round the post, and from the corner his punched clearance dropped to John Bumstead, who drove a first-timer wide of target.

Chelsea just about held the edge as the game struggled into the last quarter, but the second goal was a tragedy for Mal Donaghy, who looked one of the classiest players on

the pitch.

Spackman tried a long-range drive, Sealey blocked, but failed to hold on and Donaghy, running back alongside Pat Nevin, pushed the attempted clearance into his own net.

That happened after 79 minutes, a rare moment of excitement in a match otherwise notable for a strange air of disjointed lethargy that affected both sides.

Hammers' defeat helps!

WHILE the Town were losing at Stamford Bridge last night, West Ham were being beaten at Goodison Park to give the Hatters further leeway in the relegation fight.

Today's Luton total of 48 points may turn out to be enough to secure the future, but manager David Pleat wants his team to make sure of it in Saturday's home game with Leicester (3 pm).

Weekend victories at home to Arsenal and away to Aston Villa pushed the Town up to 16th place in the First Division table, their highest placing since October.

And with two late games still to be played — at Coventry on May 23 and at home to Everton on May 28 — the Town could climb higher still.

Everton wrapped up the league title by winning at home to QPR on Monday, and celebrated last night by beating West Ham 3-0.

Sunderland are doomed to relegation, along with Stoke,

after being beaten 2-0 at Leicester on Monday.

Coventry are favourites for the third relegation spot, but have games in hand to leave pressure on Norwich, West Ham, Ipswich, Luton and Watford.

Today's First Division table:

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Everton	30	27	6	5	26	36	87
Man Utd	40	21	10	9	73	41	73
Spurs	39	21	8	10	74	45	71
Liverpool	37	19	10	8	58	29	67
Arsenal	41	19	8	14	59	47	65
Se'ten	40	18	10	12	57	45	64
Chelsea	40	17	12	11	41	46	63
Sheff Wed	43	16	14	10	56	42	62
Not Forest	40	18	7	15	55	47	61
A. Villa	41	15	11	15	59	58	56
W. Brom	41	15	6	19	56	48	54
Leicester	42	15	6	20	45	69	51
Newcastle	41	13	12	16	55	70	51
QPR	41	13	11	17	52	49	50
Watford	39	12	13	14	43	65	49
Luton	39	13	9	17	51	60	48
Ipswich	39	12	10	17	44	55	45
West Ham	38	11	12	15	44	53	45
Norwich	40	12	9	19	41	45	45
Coventry	37	12	4	21	40	61	35
Sunderland	41	10	10	21	39	60	40
Stoke	39	9	8	22	29	94	17

Match Details

CHELSEA 2 LUTON TOWN 0
HALF-TIME: 1-0

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Parker, Nicholas, Turner; Brian Stein, Bunn (Mark Stein, 71 mins), Harford.

CHELSEA: Niedzwiecki; Jones, McLaughlin, Lee, Roug-vie; Bumstead (Canoville, 85 mins), Spackman, Thomas, Speedie; Nevin, Dixon.

THE GOALS: Kerry Dixon, far post header, 26 minutes; Mal Donaghy own goal, 79 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town four wide and two blocked; Chelsea three wide and five saved. Corners: 7-6 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 13,789, season's second lowest at Stamford Bridge.

REFEREE: Mike James, Horsham — was given an easy evening with no hassle from either team.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very poor, with neither side able to play good football on a surface which had been over-watered and bogged down both teams.

Team fit for City

THE three players who missed the Chelsea match will be back in the Town's squad for the game that should settle their future on Saturday.

"It will be a bit of a cup final," forecast coach Trevor Hartley yesterday as he looked forward to the match against Leicester City at Kenilworth Road.

Manager David Pleat left out Meka Nwajiobi and David Preece at Chelsea to save them for Saturday. Ricky Hill was out with a knee injury, but that is clearing up and he should be back in the side to meet Leicester.

"Four games in eight days is a very difficult proposition, especially at this time of the season," said Hartley. "There is no doubt that at Stamford Bridge we looked tired."

Manager David Pleat figured that the one-goal victory over Aston Villa on Monday took a lot of the pressure off his team. Defeat against Chelsea was no disaster, and everyone at Kenilworth Road relishes the prospect of turning Saturday into a day of celebration.



● MISSING: Hill, Preece and Nwajiobi should be back to face Leicester.



● HEADS! Brian Stein tries a header but goalkeeper Eddie Niedzwiecki has the ball covered.