

An easy lead pales into a drawn result

FOR 70 MINUTES at St James's Park last night Luton Town looked like cruising to a well-deserved first league victory of the season. The re-shaped team, with three enforced changes looked altogether too classy, confident and clever for managerless Newcastle.

The Town had eased into a two-goal lead and with 22 minutes to go were given a penalty which should have made it.

But Gary Parker missed from the spot and slightly-crestfallen Town manager David Pleat confessed "that inspired Newcastle — it's probably a pity the penalty was awarded."

Within eight minutes of Martin Thomas saving from Parker, Newcastle found enough extra commitment and forceful determination to snatch two quick goals and save a point.

Transformation

Mr Pleat and the other Town fans who made the longest league journey of the season could scarcely believe the late transformation as 21,000 Geordies yelled their team into frantic attacks.

There was disappointment in the Town camp at losing the lead and some annoyance at a refereeing decision which led to Newcastle's first goal.

But the good news to counter balance that is that the re-shuffled Town team settled into the old smooth style after a slightly hesitant start.

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

Steve Foster and Tim Breacker were ruled out of the defence by injuries and Ashley Grimes and Paul Elliott made their comebacks after 10 month absences.

Both showed little sign of rustiness and Elliott dominated lumbering George Reilly so completely that even the Geordie fans were cheering at the ex-Watford striker.

Parker deputised for the injured Ricky Hill, and showed a welcome turn of speed and a willingness to join the attack before his energy began to drain in the closing stages on a lush green pitch.

Peter Nicholas, skipper for the game, led by example and with Brian Stein, Mick Harford and Meka Nwajiobi interchanging cleverly Newcastle defence had a harrowing spell until midway through the second half.

The goals the Town deserved were made and taken by Nwajiobi and Harford. Harford's pass in the 32nd minute gave Nwajiobi an opening to lash in a perfect shot from the inside-left position. Three minutes



● Brian Stein is tripped by Newcastle defender Glenn Roeder to give the Town a penalty.

after half-time Parker's corner was back-headed at the near post by the Nigerian and Harford scored with a far-post header.

The penalty in the 68th minute was given when Stein was tripped. Harford had cramp which was why Parker was given a chance to get the goal his performance deserved.

After he missed New-



● Emeka Nwajiobi shoots past the advancing goalkeeper to put the Town one up after a through ball from Mick Harford.

MATCH DETAILS

NEWCASTLE 2, LUTON TOWN 2

HALF-TIME: 0-1

TOWN: Dibble; Thomas, Elliott, Donaghy, Grimes; Parker, Nicholas, Preece; Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi. Sub: Mark North, not used.

NEWCASTLE: Thomas; Anderson, Parke, Roeder, Wharton; Gascoine, McDonald, Megson (McCreery 69 minutes); Beardsley, Reilly, Stewart.

THE GOALS: Meka Nwajiobi 32 minutes and Mick Harford 48 minutes for the Town; Peter Beardsley 72 minutes and Glenn Roeder 76 minutes for Newcastle.

OTHER STRIKES: Town eight including a penalty saved, four wide; Newcastle six saved, eight wide. Corners: 6-3 to Newcastle.

ATTENDANCE: 21,304 including a couple of hundred from Luton.

REFEREE: Ian Hendick, Preston — had a fair game although the Town thought he made one crucial error leading to a Newcastle goal.

ENTERTAINMENT: Tremendous value for money, with a lovely mixture of skill from the Town and passionate commitment from Newcastle.

castle mounted a desperate late surge. Reilly laid back a ball for Peter Beardsley to reduce the arrears in the 72nd minute with the Town convinced that Reilly had fouled Elliott in the process. Four minutes later Glenn Roeder hammered in the equaliser and it was only through a good save by Andy Dibble at three minutes from time that Beardsley was robbed of a winner.