

GOALS IN THE BANK?

LUTON TOWN 1, IPSWICH 0

WITH THE menacing shadow of Manchester United on the horizon, a much-needed home victory was achieved on Tuesday against a team concentrating on avoiding a thrashing.

The only real grumble a restless crowd could have had was that the Town should have run up their best result of the season against struggling Ipswich.

Yet the defiant visitors deserve credit for refusing to cave in, even if they showed little sign of improving their dismal goals output of four in nine games.

"We knew we would have to defend well, and hope to get something on the break," said Ipswich manager Bobby Ferguson, who has seen his beleaguered team slide into the bottom three in the league table with only two wins from the first quarter of the season.

Without England centre-half Terry Butcher, and with six-foot

striker Mich D'Avray also missing through injury, Ipswich's makeshift team worked hard to try to stifle some promising Town attacks.

They played with three defenders, with on-loan Ian Atkins operating just in front of them, and pushed midfielders Trevor Putney and Kevin Wilson well forward to try to stop the Town's full-backs overlapping in attack.

It took the Town nearly an hour to get the breakthrough as Ipswich rode their luck, soaked up pressure and survived dangerous moments through the Town's inability to add decisive finishing to good approach play.

An erratic referee helped neither side, and both managers agreed that the three bookings by Mr Malcolm Cotton of Surrey were unnecessary. Mark Brennan and Alan Sunderland were the Ipswich victims. Almost inevitably Mick Harford, on his last appearance before suspension for a sending-off, was the Town

culprit, cautioned for digging an elbow into Ian Cranson.

It was the third consecutive match in which Harford's name has been the subject of a ref's report, and if we complain that he is becoming a marked man, all the more reason for the player to be ultra-cautious.

Mr Cotton had an appalling evening. The bookings were over the top, he missed a blatant handball by Romeo Zondervan, and gave a goal-kick when Paul Cooper pulled off a brilliant finger-tip save to flick a Harford drive over the bar. Mr Cotton frayed a lot of nerves on and off the pitch.

At half-time you could feel worry and frustration in the atmosphere as the crowd wondered why a lot of pressure, and some outstanding passing moves had brought no result.

Mitchell Thomas was doing his job as a winger again, David Preece was in a golden vein of form and some moves were

classics. "Perhaps we over-played at times," said Luton manager David Pleat.

Zondervan marked Ricky Hill tightly, but Ipswich had to defend in depth.

The golden moments came early in the second half, the first when Brian Stein nutmegged Kevin Steggle and crossed for Harford to shoot wide under pressure, and the second when Stein made another jinking run down the left after taking a pass from Meka Nwajiobi. Stein hammered over a low cross and Nwajiobi fell down and still managed to score.

Ipswich tried to be more adventurous by sending on Jason Dozell to boost their attack, but he put a couple of headers off target and when Putney carved out a chance for Sunderland the shot was weak and straight at Les Sealey.

Cooper at the other end was much busier and prevented further disaster by his save from Harford

and another from a cracking drive by Stein.

At other times his goal bore a charmed life, and if narrow misses go into the bank of football fortune Manchester United might just have a rude shock waiting for them on Saturday.

DETAILS

TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Nwajiobi, Harford, Stein. Sub: Parker, not needed.

IPSWICH: Cooper; Gernon, Steggle (Dozell, 65 mins), Cranson; Zondervan, Yallop, Atkins, Putney, Wilson; Brennan, Sunderland.

THE GOAL: Meka Nwajiobi, 61 minutes, from Brian Stein's left-wing run and cross.

OTHER STRIKES: Town 13 saved, ten wide; Ipswich four saved and six wide. Corners 12-4 to the Town.

REFEREE: Malcolm Cotton, Surrey. Had an off-night, and should have let the game flow much better. Despite three bookings it was not a clogging match.

ATTENDANCE: 8,553, lowest of the season at Kenilwo Road, and 4,000 lower than when Ipswich came for a Saturday match last season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Highly promising as the Town showed signs of regaining the old style, even if the work in the Ipswich penalty area did not match the quality elsewhere.



● **NEARLY:** Brian Stein cracks in a shot which brought a brilliant save from Ipswich goalkeeper Paul Cooper as the Town pressed forward in the second half on Tuesday.