



● **BLOCKED:** Steve Foster's shot from a free kick is charged down.

Keeper makes it a crazy result

A LUCKY BREAK at one end and superhuman goalkeeping at the other enabled Coventry City to make a mockery of the day's events when they ended the Town's proud record of never losing a league game on plastic.

They stole the points and killed the game, with Steve Ogrizovic's heroics the only admirable enterprise they could muster.

The attendance was over a thousand higher than the normal hard core, and if the extra customers were lured to Kenilworth Road by the Town's win at White Hart Lane a week earlier, they can rest assured that the normal entertainment standard is a lot better than Coventry wanted it to be.

While the visitors were lucky to win, they were able to claim that they devised particular tactics for the day and put them into effect with smothering ability.

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

It was a smash-and-grab robbery, and even Coventry skipper Wayne Turner, a spectator while waiting for injury to heal, confessed that Luton fans would see it as just that.

"We knew what to expect from Luton, worked out our tactics and got the result," he said.

It was not a case of the Town playing badly, even though they were unable to get round the back of a packed defence often enough.

The goal attempts figures speak for themselves: Coventry were negative to the point of pulling nine men back for long periods, and occasionally playing 40-yard back-passes rather than attempt to go forward.

They smothered their own penalty area, still could not protect their goalkeeper completely, and escaped because Ogrizovic was in top form.

When he was beaten, by Brian Stein's last-minute lob, Trevor Peake got back to hook the ball off the line and deny the Town an equaliser that would have been the least they deserved.

The cruel irony of the day was that Les Sealey, who has been so consistent, made an uncharacteristic error to complete the all-important first goal.

It was the first of two Coventry moves which actually produced shots on target in the 90 minutes—Sealey saved the other, from Terry Gibson, in the 72nd minute.

The decisive goal to end a run of 11 home league games without defeat came when Dave Bennett broke down Coventry's right wing. Mitchell Thomas's clearance was not strong enough, Dave Bowman shot hard and low from the corner of the penalty area and a deflection helped unsettle Sealey. He still got down to his left hand post, but fumbled the ball and somehow it went through his arms into the net.

That was all Coventry wanted to make their day. They had to live dangerously, concentrate on defence, and tackle and harry for everything on the 18-yard line.

They also collected five bookings, although referee John Moules made the Town suffer as

well by adding Mick Harford's name to the list.

It was not a dirty game, but Coventry were always prepared to be hard and direct in their determination to hold on to their unlikely lead.

The policy hardly deserved to succeed, but Ogrizovic had an inspired afternoon. Before Bowman's 35th-minute goal Stein had collected a David Preece pass and smashed in a rising drive which was brilliantly tipped over the bar.

Harford and Meka Nwajiobi combined to cut open Coventry's left flank, but Nwajiobi had cross arrived a second before Stein's attempt to meet it at close range.

The match was the first we have seen in rain since the new pitch was installed, and occasionally it looked as though the ball moved faster off the wet surface.

Coventry manager Don Mackay claimed the pitch was part-cause of his team's tactics. Players I spoke to had no complaints, but Mackay said he was sure the surface gives Luton a definite home advantage.

His club chairman wants the Football League to insist on natural grass on all pitches, and Mackay said his players found the ball difficult to control at Kenilworth Road.

Having seen the surface used in

a dozen first-team games now, I can suggest that more clubs should be considering SporTurf.

Ogrizovic, under fire at Coventry for three dodgy performances in recent weeks, enjoyed his first taste of the Luton pitch.

The last serious action of the first half was his save from Tim Breacker's 25-yard shot towards the far corner.

At the interval I felt the Town could not help but win if they stuck to their normal game. But that was without knowing of how well the Coventry 'keeper would perform.

The Town attacked the Oak Road end with sustained positive play from all departments.

Preece and Steve Foster worked a short free kick routine to give Peter Nicholas a 20-yard shot. It was right on target, but once more Ogrizovic stretched his 6ft 5in body to flip the ball over the bar.

Harford's clever chip from Preece's run and pass went just over, Foster's drive from an indirect free kick in the box was

deflected by the wall—that was after the goalkeeper was penalised under an eccentric four-step interpretation—and Preece had a shot blocked by massed defensive bodies.

A corner by Preece, flicked on at the near post by Nwajiobi, produced a mad scramble as Harford's far post header nearly crept in.

With 14 minutes to go the Town withdrew Breacker from defence and sent on Gary Parker to augment the attacking strength.

But Coventry held out, with Ogrizovic saving at Stein's feet from a move engineered by Nwajiobi and Harford, and Peake saving the 'keeper in the final minute.

There were times when frustration induced more long-ball attempts than usual by the Town, but on the day I wouldn't complain too much about that.

Coventry got away with their stifling tactics, and the Town must surely, once again, have put a few goals in the bank. Watch out Watford!

Match details

LUTON TOWN 0, COVENTRY 1
HALF-TIME 0-1

85/86

TOWN: Sealey; Breaker (Parker 76 mins), Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Stein, Harford, Nwajiobi.
COVENTRY: Ogrizovic; Borrows, Rodger, Peake, Adams; Bowman, Gynn (Downs 89 mins), McGrath, Bennett; Evans, Gibson.

THE GOAL: Dave Bowman, 35 minutes, low shot edge of area, deflected, and slipped through Les Sealey's hands.

OTHER STRIKES: Town 11 saved and seven wide; Coventry one saved and three wide. Corners: 7-4 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 9,607 — a thousand better than for the previous home match, and higher than the corresponding game last season, on Boxing Day, when Coventry had a bigger following.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not allowed to flourish too much because Coventry were so negative, but there was excitement when Steve Ogrizovic took on the Town almost single-handed.

REFEREE: John Moules, Essex — book-happy with five cautions for Coventry men and one for Mick Harford, his fifth of the season.