



● **SO CLOSE:** Andy King can hardly believe it as a shot which might have been the equaliser, and his first Luton Town goal for nine years, is pushed around the post by goalkeeper Steve Sutton.

Missed chances lift Forest

**Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards**

FOREST manager Brian Clough was looking forward to meeting David Pleat at Nottingham.

He expected the Luton manager to buy the drinks on the strength of his "magnificent business" in raising £400,000 from the sale of Paul Elliott.

Mr. Pleat decided not to return to the ground where he began his soccer career. Had he gone he would have needed a stiff snort much more than Mr. Clough.

The Town turned in a performance which promised much and achieved little, with the first defeat in four games splitting the fans into two schools of thought.

The average away team does well to create half a dozen chances in a match,

and needs to put at least one or two away to stand a chance of winning.

So the ability to threaten the Forest goal more than a dozen times was some fair achievement, particularly from a team that missed the creative power of Ricky Hill.

To spurn so many chances is to court disaster, and it duly arrived with a little help

from referee Jeff Bray and a couple of positive strikes by Forest.

Mr. Pleat is known to be looking for a player or two to strengthen his squad. Both teams at the City Ground were forced to make unwanted changes, and Forest plugged the gaps better.

They reorganised to overcome the absence of suspended striker Peter Davenport and injured

defender Gary Birtles, and if the 4-4-2 formation looked unambitious for a home side it turned out to be effective enough.

Gary Parker deputised for the injured Hill, and like Andy King seemed to find it difficult to pick up First Division pace and timing quickly enough.

Peter Nicholas, in a consistent vein of rich form at the moment, took the midfield honours with his controlled aggression and probing passes, and until the first goal went in the Town looked more than capable of winning.

Nigel Clough, with a running style reminiscent of his father's but with a more deft touch when coming off defenders, was almost the equal of Mick Harford at the other end, but Brian Stein was marked closely and unable to capitalise on the half-chances that came his way.

There was not a lot wrong with the defence for the first hour or so.

John Robertson, no longer as quick as he used to be, played in midfield, but still passed the ball well enough to cause Tim Breacker the occasional problem, and in Franz Carr Forest had a right-winger with the pace to trouble Mitchell Thomas.

Forest stopped the full-backs overlapping with any consistency, and although David Preece worked hard as ever down the left the Town side was rarely effective down the other flank.

Harford's height and touch should have been the launching pad for the goals the Town's approach work deserved, but he too was unable to find the last decisive touch when it was needed.

Some credit goes to Forest goalkeeper Steve Sutton for a couple of good saves, but Les Sealey also had to be at his best in the second half when Forest were building on their good fortune in going a goal up.

Foster and Mal Donaghy were booked for fouls which looked to be nothing out of the ordinary, and if the opening goal owed much to the referee, it also raised questions about the failure to defend against a free kick just outside the area.

The Town had had three good chances to take the lead before that 30th-minute turning point.

In the third minute the alert Preece pounced on a misplaced pass by Johnny Metgod, scampered down the left wing and crossed perfectly. Harford out-jumped Butterworth to head the ball down for King, and he flicked the ball over the bar from close range.

In the 16th minute a flowing move involving

Match details

**NOTTM FOREST 2 LUTON TN 0
HALF-TIME 1-0**

TOWN: Sealey, Breaker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas, Parker, Nicholas, Preece, King (North, 70 mins), Stein, Harford.

FOREST: Sutton, McNally, Walker, Butterworth, Pearce, Carr, Bowyer, Metgod (Walsh 81 mins), Robertson, Webb, Clough.

THE GOALS: Nigel Clough, 20-yard free kick, 30th minute; Neil Webb from rebound after Les Sealey did well to save his header in the 78th minute.

OTHER STRIKES: Town eight saved and seven wide; Forest 11 saved and five wide. Corners: 13-8 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 12,078, Forest's lowest league gate of the season following a run of six league and cup games without a win.

REFEREE: Jeff Brany, Hinckley. Did little to keep the game flowing, dished out harsh bookings to Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy, and may have been conned for the free-kick which led to the first goal.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good value for money for home fans or neutrals, with both sides willing and able to attack, but the Town ruined their good work by failing to add the finishing touch.

Breacker, King and Parker put Stein in possession on the edge of the box. His close control left Des Walker floundering, but the shot was dragged wide of the far post.

Two minutes later it was Harford's turn to miss, with a header from a cross from Stein, and a half-chance slipped by shortly afterwards. Foster and Harford caused chaos in the Forest defence from a free-kick by Parker, and Stein's drive was deflected for a corner.

Foster's booking, for a clumsy challenge on Clough, was harsh and inhibiting, and within five minutes the Town skipper had been badly used a second time.

Ian Bowyer was trying to dribble towards goal, and all routes were closed off as the Town skipper covered the edge of the box.

Canny Bowyer, an experienced midfielder whose career has now been saved twice by his relationship with Brian Clough, fell over as Foster shaped to tackle, and Mr. Bray gave the free kick.

Clough drilled it past the wall for his tenth goal of the season, and for the first time Forest began to show a bit of confidence.

Harford put another half-chance over the bar from Nicholas's centre early in the second half, but it needed a brilliant flying save by Sealey to prevent a second Clough goal from an 18-yard cracker.

Carr's direct running down the Forest right balanced the Town's progress, and the entertainment was non-stop as both sides went for goals.

The Town had to take risks at the back, and were desperately unlucky not to

get reward in a hectic five-minute spell around the hour mark.

Forest conceded four corners in barely two minutes as the Town piled on pressure. A frantic clearance denied Harford when King and Parker almost worked an opening for him, Nicholas pulled a 20-yarder wide, and the first of the corners produced an astonishing near miss.

Preece took it, Harford headed on towards goal and Donaghy rose to deflect the ball towards the top corner. Sutton's save tipped it over the bar, and he repeated it to push a drive by King around the post.

The goalkeeper was then saved from that corner when King's drive was heading for the far corner until it hit Stein and bounced wide.

Mark North was sent in place of King for the last 20 minutes, but the Town had little more to offer after going so close so often.

They still pushed forward with a will, but Forest hit hard on the break, particularly through Carr.

His cross in the 78th minute led to Webb, a midfielder being used as a striker, heading powerfully for goal. Sealey did well to block that effort, but Webb followed up to hammer in the rebound.

Another Carr break gave Forest sub Colin Walsh a chance, but he shot wide, and when Carr tried his luck Sealey arched acrobatically to finger-tip that one over the bar.

By the end Forest were on top, with Town fans restricted to the consolation of knowing it might have been so different if the early superiority had been turned into goals.