

Muscle-power

has the last word

Match details
CHELSEA 1 LUTON TOWN 0
HALF-TIME: 0-0
TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Stein, North (Daniel, 77 mins), Newell.
CHELSEA: Niedzwiecki; Lee, McLaughlin, Rougvie, Dublin; Bumstead, Spackman, Hazard; Nevin, Dixon, Speedie. Sub: Canoville, not needed.
THE GOAL: David Speedie, 55th minute, first-time drive after Kerry Dixon headed on the goalkeeper's long punted clearance.
OTHER STRIKES: Town seven saved, eight wide, one hit the bar; Chelsea six saved and six wide. Corners 7-1 to Chelsea.
REFEREE: John Martin, Alton — remembered as the villain in the FA Cup semi-final last season, but did brilliantly at Stamford Bridge, particularly in resisting pressure from Chelsea players and fans alike who thought every decision should go in favour of the home team.
BOOKINGS: Doug Rougvie and Steve Foster. Both justified, with Rougvie so heavy and clumsy he might have been sent off for persistent fouling.
ATTENDANCE: 21,102, third highest of the season so far at any Town match, beaten only by Everton and Liverpool.
ENTERTAINMENT: Too frantic and physical to be a real spectacle, and turned into huge disappointment for Town fans because they should have had two or three goals to cheer long before Chelsea got their act together in the second half.

THE MOST relieved man at Stamford Bridge as Chelsea maintained their mathematical chances of challenging for the league title was home manager John Hollins.

He admitted the obvious after his side beat a Town team that might have been comfortable winners by the interval.

"We were all over the shop," said Hollins. But the Town had failed to cash in after conceding a Chelsea challenge based on physical power, and were unable to exert the same control for the second half.

Mick Harford, suspended and injured, was a helpless spectator as the Town failed only in the vital matter of getting the final shot on target.

They were so much on top until the interval that even skipper Steve Foster was able to become an attacker, but he too caught the mystery miss-it bug.

New signing Mick Newell had an unhappy First Division debut, but could hardly have had a more difficult match to kick off his Luton Town career.

He and Mark North were willing workers, but Chelsea, in front of their own menacing fans, had a steel and bite which often went beyond the limits of football laws.

Free kicks were given away to stifle the more enterprising approach of the Town, and the tragedy for football was that the Town were unable to take advantage of them.

Bobby Robson was watching the Town for the second time in six days, preparing to name an England squad for a World Cup warm-up friendly in Egypt.

Kerry Dixon of Chelsea has probably already done enough to warrant a place in the Mexico party. Against a Town defence marshalled as expertly as ever by Foster, he made only three notable breaks, but one of them was

part of the build-up to the goal that settled it.

One first-half sprint was a second to early, and the offside whistle sounded as he netted. Mike Hazard put Dixon clear for a second time, but he shot wide as Les Sealey advanced.

Chelsea's only other serious attack of the first half was in the 43rd minute when a long free kick was flicked on by Pat Nevin and David Speedie's drive was brilliantly saved by Les Sealey.

The Chelsea goal had been under much greater threat throughout the first 45 minutes.

Mitchell Thomas must have inspired Robson with a typical surging game down the left. Ricky Hill and David Preece held the midfield attacking edge and Chelsea took to by-passing that department with long passes when they realised Peter Nicholas was prepared to meet fire with fire in that department.

The Town's build-up work was a delight to watch, and Doug Rougvie in particular dished out some violent retribution as the Chelsea defence was outplayed. He conceded free kicks for fouls on Newell and Brian Stein, and was booked in the 23rd minute for a cynical chop on Hill.

It was crude aggression, and unhappily for the Town brawn won the day against brains. Later in the match Rougvie went down injured. "The bolt must have fallen out of his neck," was one shout as the trainer went on.

So far as winning and holding the ball was concerned the Town were easily the better side in the first half.

But Hill, doing well to get into dangerous positions, spoiled it by wast-

ing three chances, two slashed wide and the other saved.

Stein put another wide from about ten yards, and Chelsea must have known it was their lucky day when their defence was spreadeagled again in the 40th minute. Tim Breacker's cross to the far side of the goal was met by North's thundering first-time drive. It was hit so hard that it rebounded to safety like a clearance after crashing against the bar.

Hollins read the riot act to his side during the interval. They closed down Town players more effectively, slowed down the overlaps by Town players, and shared the second-half possession.

The harsh lesson that a lightweight attack will suffer for missing opportunities was rammed home in the 55th minute.

It was beginning to look as though neither side would break the other's defence again until Speedie capitalised on his pace and strength. He rifled in the 55th-minute winner from a chance created by Eddie Niedzwiecki's long punted clearance and Dixon's flick-on header.

It was direct, very simple, and devastating, and enough to keep Chelsea in third place in the league.

Both managers agreed that it had not been sparkling entertainment, and a gusty wind had caused extra problems. For the most part each team had cancelled out the other.

It was a little similar to the 1-1 draw between the sides of Kenilworth Road. On that occasion Harford was in the Town side, and scored. He was missed at Stamford Bridge.