



● **CLINCHER:** Steve Foster powers in the header that gave Mike Newell the winning goal.

# PAYING BACK THE HEARTBREAK

**LEAGUE LEADERS** Everton went home from Kenilworth Road like men suffering from shell-shock after Luton Town ended their 18-match unbeaten run.

Skipper Steve Foster led a magnificent Town display to turn potential heartbreak to delight as two late goals gave us some consolation for recent cup disappointments against Howard Kendall's men.

Everton hardly knew what hit them after snatching the lead with a fluke goal against the run of play, and then trying to shut up shop.

Derek Mountfield, whose late header at Villa Park a year ago broke Luton hearts, understood our feelings after he saw his side suffer the same kind of disappointment.

"We thought we would win it before we gave away those stupid goals in the last ten minutes," he said. "We did our jobs for 80 minutes, but it's a 90-minute game. The last ten minutes was just a joke."

The extra irony was that the team which did for Luton in the semi-final through two set pieces was itself done on this occasion by goals from a free kick and a corner.

It would all have been so sweet but for a touch of bitterness provoked firstly by players, then by the referee.

Town boss David Pleat complained at the way Everton men rolled over in apparent mortal pain from some of the Town's tackling. They mysteriously recovered after inconsistent ref Ray Lewis dished out four bookings to the Town, none to Everton.

It seemed fair comment to me, and Everton could not claim it was nervous reaction to defeat — Foster, Nicholas, Thomas and Johnson were all cautioned between Everton's goal and the Town's equaliser.

"We were in control, and I thought we had the game," said Everton manager Howard

Kendall. "Foster took his goals well, but he was unchallenged for each header. Normally we pride ourselves on not letting in goals like that."

Only after the game was it announced that Mike Newell had scored the late winner, getting the final touch to Foster's second goal-bound header.

Everton's professionalism enabled them to accept their fluke lead as though winning teams deserve that sort of luck. They then slowed down the game and tried to absorb the Town pressure they knew was inevitable.

Mr Pleat complained to a linesman about time-wasting when Everton were leading, then apologised. He also doubted the wisdom of the system that brought Mr Lewis into a Town match for the third time this season, while there are other refs we will not see at all.

I might agree if I thought it possible for any group of men to be perfect in every game. My thoughts after a highly enjoyable afternoon's entertainment were about players and teams, about uplifting goals, and about football as a whole being boosted by the Town's achievements on the day.

## CONTAIN

Contain first, look for the forward break second, was the Everton policy that could not work this time simply because the Town raised the level of their response much better than in the previous meetings.

For the third time in three weeks disappointment looked on the cards until Foster's massive influence, so vital in defence, was transferred emphatically to attack as well.

He and Mal Donaghy denied Graeme Sharp and Gary Lineker a single clear sight of goal, save for an early scare when a corner was half-cleared and Les Sealey saved with his legs as Lineker shot.

Mountfield wasted a better chance after Sealey's only mistake, shooting wide from an angle after Paul Bracewell's shot bobbled away from the goalkeeper.

Nevill Southall, Everton skipper in the absence of Kevin Ratcliffe — Gary Stevens and Peter Reid were also out with injuries — had to work much harder as the Town became the

dominant attacking side.

Tim Breacker put extra firepower into a four-man midfield, following his run-out in the role at Old Trafford. David Preece revelled in the left side attacking job, and his inventive play and hard running pulled Everton out of shape at the back.

The side settled into a typical Luton Town pattern, passing the ball well and choosing the right point of attack almost every time.

There was a useful variety in the approach work, and Everton got to the interval lucky to be level.

## JUSTICE

Southall saved an early drive by Breacker, was beaten when Mick Harford glanced a delicate header against a post, and was much relieved when from another cross by Preece, Harford's thundering header, taken at full stretch with a leap between two defenders, flew inches over the bar.

Harford kept Everton on tenterhooks, and their need to have two men in attendance on him opened the way for other Town men to find gaps.

The skill highlight in the first half was when Ricky Hill got into the six-yard box with his back to goal, juggled the ball under close control and then sent an athletic bicycle kick over his shoulder and just too high.

Almost inevitably, Preece was the man who supplied the cross for that.

Everton's hopes took a dive just before half-time when Kevin Sheedy pulled up with a hamstring injury and had to be substituted.

The Town had been so much on top that the opening goal in the first minute of the second half was a shock that might have killed off any team.

Lineker was probing for an opening in the inside right position, and could see no way through. He laid off a short pass to Kevin Richardson, who decided to try his luck.

The ball hit Rob Johnson, then pinged off Foster, completing its zig-zag path into the net with Sealey having no chance to save.

The Town's teamwork miraculously held its shape and pattern as they dominated the game.

Everton were inviting an irresistible force to have a go, mainly because they had no real choice against a team that found its 11-man form in the face of potential adversity.

Southall performed heroics against Newell and Harford as the tide swamped Everton's defence and midfield.

Foster, always an inspiration, joined the attack, and the very least the Town deserved was his powerfully-headed equaliser from Hill's free kick with nine minutes to go.

The great delight at that moment was that for the first time in recent meetings with Everton, you could sense that a winning goal was inevitable and that it would be the Town who would score it.

Justice was done four minutes later. Rarely can Everton have experienced the near-panic that set in as the Town went for them, and Foster's second decisive header, from a corner by Preece, bulleted towards the net.

Newell claimed the final touch, and his skipper had no complaints about that — he had been close to an Irish hat-trick with suggestions that he had scored Everton's goal, and was quite content to give one to Richardson and the other to Newell.

## Match details

**LUTON TOWN 2 EVERTON 1**

**HALF-TIME: 0-0**

**TOWN:** Sealey; Johnson, Foster, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Breacker, Nicholas, Preece; Harford, Newell. Sub: King, not needed.

**EVERTON:** Southall; Harper, Van den Hauwe, Mountfield, Pinton; Steven, Richardson, Bracewell, Sheedy (Marshall, 52 miles); Sharp, Lineker.

**THE GOALS:** Kevin Richardson for Everton, 46th minute, 18-yard shot taking deflections off Johnson and then Foster to wrong-foot Les Sealey; Steve Foster for the Town, 81 minutes, thumping header from Ricky Hill's free kick; Mike Newell for the town, 85 minutes, putting finishing touch to another goal-bound header by Foster, from corner by David Preece.

**OTHER STRIKES:** Town ten saved, six wide, one hit a post; Everton four saved and four wide. Corners: 6-4 to the Town.

**ATTENDANCE:** 10,949, highest home league gate this year.

**REFEREE:** Ray Lewis, Great Bookham. The Town were convinced his worst mistakes came from being conned by Everton play-acting to provoke bookings.

**BOOKED:** Steve Foster, Peter Nicholas for fouls; Mitchell Thomas and Rob Johnson for talking out of turn.

**ENTERTAINMENT:** Absolutely superb thanks to the Town's astonishing late double strike. Their earlier work deserved success too, with some of the first-half team-work hitting heights of excellence.