

Iron Man is back!

City play it Curtis' way

By NEVILLE FOULGER

Coventry City 1, Luton Town 0

THE great escape is on again — thanks to a Nick Pickering goal and two "old boys" from a much happier era.

Executive director George Curtis and youth team coach John Sillett turned the clock back 20 years on Saturday to re-create the spirit and barnstorming approach which swept Coventry City to success in the swinging 60s.

BOTTOM 8

Man City	39	11	11	17	41	52	44
Aston Villa	40	9	14	17	46	62	41
COVENTRY	40	10	10	20	46	69	40
Leicester	39	9	12	18	52	70	39
Ipswich	39	10	8	21	28	50	38
Oxford	38	8	12	18	55	75	36
Birmingham	40	8	5	27	30	67	29
WBA	39	4	10	25	30	83	22

The relegation-threatened Sky Blues responded with their most committed attacking performance of the season to earn their most vital victory.

Now City have a sporting chance of avoiding the drop yet again, with Leicester, Ipswich and Oxford suddenly in deeper trouble than they are.

The gremlins which have plagued the Sky Blues at Highfield Road this season, vanished under the attitude and approach demanded by Curtis and Sillett, in charge until the end of the season after the resignation of manager Don Mackay.



Golden goal: a grounded Nick Pickering (left) watches his shot go through the packed Luton defence for City's vital 47th minute match-winner

It was up and at 'em, football-without-frills stuff as City waded into Luton with a non-stop show of aggressive attacking.

Curtis was satisfied. "The players gave us what we wanted — we can't ask for more than that. Although there was only one goal we pushed forward and created a lot of chances.

"I reckon we had as many men in the opposition box in 90 minutes as we've had in the rest of the season put together. In the five days John and I spent with the players in training we tried to get them motivated and believing in themselves.

"They knew what we wanted and they went out there and put up a hell of a fight. Even if they had lost or drawn the match, John and I would have been happy with the way they played. They have proved they are not as bad as people make them out to be," said Curtis.

Eager

Until England Under-21 international Pickering snapped up the golden goal in the 47th minute, however, it was looking as though City might frustratingly fail in the quest for the three vital points.

A succession of chances were wasted in the first half with Alan Brazil the biggest sufferer, and City's nerve ends were starting to show. Then the powerful Pickering broke the deadlock, surging forward to beat Les Sealey with a left-foot shot which went in off the inside of the far post.

What a capture he's proving to be with his strong running, willingness to work, and eagerness to get into scoring positions as often as possible. "It was a terrific relief to score this goal because I could

feel the tension around the ground. Now I feel we can stay up — we'll certainly be giving it everything we have," said Pickering.

Striker Cyrille Regis also seemed to have thrived on the Curtis-Sillett training schedule. He offered an eye-catching lung-bursting show up front to spearhead City's attack with a verve and vigour which has not been apparent in him for some weeks.

Luton centre-half Steve Foster was given a tough time of it as rampaging Regis went to work, unsettling defenders and creating chances. He helped lay on three for his front line partner Brazil, but for the former Ipswich, Spurs and Manchester United man it was just one of those days.

He saw Sealey save one shot, blasted another narrowly wide, lost control of the ball after dribbling round the goalkeeper and then, when he was on target, had the shot cleared off the line by Rob Johnson.

Spirit

All-action Regis who was also involved in the move which finally brought the goal from Pickering said: "I thought it was a great team performance and I think we proved we have the character and the spirit to win the battle against relegation.

"It's our fault we are in this position because we blew it after the Leicester match back in March. None of us want Division II football next season and this win now gives us a fighting chance of staying up. We've got to take it."

The performance though made a nonsense of City's earlier efforts at home this season when they have seemed unwilling — or afraid — to attack until they have been a couple of goals down.

Dave Bennett and Micky Adams probed and foraged down the flanks ably supported by full-backs Brian Borrows and Greg Downs.

Big centre-half Brian Kilcline also enjoyed his most impressive match for a few weeks, completely dominating the dangerous Mick Harford. And alongside him Trevor Peake was again the model of consistency.

The final word though must go to Curtis. A press colleague as "Were you sur- look such



Foulger match file

RATINGS

Ogrizovic	6
Borrows	7
Downs	7
Adams	7
Kilcline	8
Peake	7
Bennett	7
McGrath	6
Regis	8
Brazil	6
Pickering	9
Sub: Rodger	

Luton: Sealey; Johnson, Thomas, Nicholas, Foster, Donaghy, Hill, Breacker, Harford, Newell, Preece. Sub: Stein (for Johnson) 68min.

Referee: D. Phillips (Barnsley).

Attendance: 10,146.

Ratings key: 10—out of this world. 9—outstanding. 8—very good. 7—good. 6—average. 5—poor. 4—dismal. Below 4—an absolute stinker.



ENTERTAINMENT

CITY fans are not the most demanding of supporters. At the moment, they will settle for a glimmer of hope and players giving 100 per cent effort and committed to attack. That's what they saw in this match — and that's an improvement.



CROWD

IN his programme message, City chairman John Poynton said: "It is more important than ever that we all pull together now. It is vital that we have all of you with us." The Sky Blues could not complain about the backing they were given and hopefully it will be the same for the final match against QPR.



My ball: former Sky Blues goalkeeper Les Sealey safely gathers a centre as Cyrille Regis challenges

● More pictures in tomorrow's lunch edition