

TOUCH OF CLASS FINISHES CITY

Match Details

86/87

LUTON TOWN 1 MANCHESTER CITY 0
HALF-TIME 0-0

Reports by Brian Swain — Pictures by Mark Richards

THE NEWS that Mick Harford may have a chance of returning to the Town's side at White Hart Lane on Saturday was the day's second bright spot after the struggle to dispose of Manchester City at Kenilworth Road.

Rocked by the loss of their manager, dreadfully short of attacking fire-power, and apparently a little short on positive ambition, City got within nine minutes of snatching their fourth consecutive goal-less draw.

Their goalkeeper, Perry Suckling, was man of the match and the combination of heroics and some wayward finishing by the Town almost produced Kenilworth Road's third consecutive game without a goal.

The frustrations ended when Brian Stein, in his farewell appearance before a two-match suspension, showed the touch of class and composure everyone else seemed to lack. It was a flash of genius on what could have become a gloomy occasion.

City contributed little to the entertainment. Caretaker manager Jimmy Frizzell relaxed the sweeper method he inherited from Billy McNeill, but still had to suffer the pain of seeing a side which offered defiance in defence and precious little anywhere else.

The Town enjoyed almost total domination, but not enough of the chances they created fell to Brian Stein.

His brother Mark, introduced for his first full game of the season in place of midfielder

Robert Wilson, and Mike Newell are short of the experience and touch needed for First Division football.

Both need time and games. On the Town's synthetic pitch you also need a sure first touch, and City were shorter of that than the Town were.

The game might have been a Luton romp, because Mr Frizzell could hardly believe the generosity of his team. They worked with a fair amount of discipline in defence, but hardly ever threatened to build a decent passing move at the other end.

"We worked hard, and the defence did well. But we kept giving the ball away," he said.

Town boss John Moore missed the match because he was in Scotland looking at players. He returned to hear coach Ray Harford report that the team had played pretty well up to the point of delivering a good final thrust.

The match facts speak for themselves, with 25 attempts at goal by the Town. "We only brought the keeper into action on about a third of them," said Harford.

"Our problem is that Brian Stein is the only one scoring regularly — Mark Stein and Mick Newell haven't got his composure yet."

Ironically, City might have snatched an undeserved victory. Defensively, the Town's major problem was to retain a dependable shape. Time and again the action was at the other end, and there was always a danger that the Town's defenders and midfield men would be drawn into the over-crowded City half and leave holes at the back which good counter-attackers might exploit.

Fortunately, City showed why they had not managed a single goal in their previous four matches, including one against Fourth Division Southend.

It took them an hour to win

their first corner, and the only time the Town's defence looked like being pulled out of shape was a couple of minutes before Stein's winner.

Neil McNab's long ball found a hole down the middle, but Darren Beckford wasted the opportunity by shooting wide.

Les Sealey was never under any pressure, and Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy will rarely have an easier day. Trevor Christie, once a good centre-forward, hardly had a look-in.

Ashley Grimes and Rob Johnson had time to concentrate on supporting attacks, but City's tactics denied space in the last third of the pitch.

Overall, the Town's teamwork did enough to deserve the points, despite the wasteful use of scoring chances.

The Town won 13 corners to City's two, and one in the 13th minute saw a lucky break for the admirable Suckling.

He had done well to tip a 25-yarder by Ricky Hill over the bar. David Preece dropped the corner onto Hill's head by the near post, and from the back-header Brian Stein headed against the bar. Brian Stein's drive from the rebound was blocked by full-back Clive Wilson.

Mark Stein, Hill, Newell and Brian Stein were all foiled by Suckling as the Town piled on the pressure, with Suckling's tip-over from a Brian Stein header quite superb. So was the delicate chipped cross by Peter Nicholas that made it possible.

It needed a touch of class to settle matters, with Brian Stein capitalising on half a chance created by his brother's good pass to Hill and Hill's quick low ball inside. Stein controlled deftly, turned quickly and despatched a low drive into the bottom corner.

Having survived for 81 minutes, City felt slightly aggrieved. If they had held on for a draw, it would have been no great service to football.

TOWN: Sealey; Johnson, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Mark Stein, Brian Stein, Newell. Sub: Nwajobi, not used.

CITY: Suckling; May, Clements, McCarthy, Wilson; Hopkins, Redmond, McNab, Simpson; Christie (White, 83 mins), Beckford.

THE GOAL: Brian Stein, quick turn and low shot after Perry Suckling had defied everything else for 81 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town ten saved, 13 wide, one hit the bar; City two saved and five wide. Corners: 13-2 to the Town. ATTENDANCE: 9,371, a drop of 625 on City's last visit.

REFEREE: Jim Borrett, Norfolk. Should have enjoyed an easy match. The Town dominated so much he hardly had to move out of City's half of the field.

ENTERTAINMENT: Could have been superb if the Town had got the goals their control deserved. City offered only brave defence and a very good goalkeeper in Perry Suckling.