

DEFENCES MAKE IT DEADLOCK

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THE FOURTH goalless draw of the season left another taste of frustration all round, off the pitch as well as on it, as Norwich City took a point from Kenilworth Road.

The Canaries found it much more satisfying than Luton Town. They went to the top of the First Division, for only the second time in their history, on a day when they thought the odds were stacked against them.

Manager Ken Brown, whose judgement deserves respect, found the atmosphere as unreal as the pitch, and his great sadness was that genuine law-abiding Canaries' fans were not allowed to see a historic occasion.

He is against synthetic pitches, but his goalkeeper, who kept Norwich in the game, took a different view.

Graham Benstead had kept his fifth consecutive clean sheet, and showed why Mr Brown was happy to dispose of Chris Woods in the summer for £600,000.

"The pitch is really nice," he said. "The only thing was that the ball seemed to run on it a little bit quicker."

Town manager John Moore, hiding most of his disappointment, paid fair tribute to the workmanlike job Norwich did to avoid defeat.

The Town were unbeaten at home, and Norwich had not lost away, and Benstead thought the Town had been as hard as any opposition he had faced so far.

The stalemate was the mixture that is becoming all too familiar.

The Town defence has settled into a dependable unit. They have conceded only one home league goal in five outings at Kenilworth Road. But the attack has scored only once in its last five games, and that against Manchester City, who are now bottom of the

First Division.

Norwich came with a solid game plan: they defended well, tried to keep possession when they had the ball, and might even have nicked a goal or two on the break.

It needs guile and instinctive sharpness to overcome a team capable of operating such a plan effectively.

The Town, said Mr Moore, are like Liverpool without Ian Rush and Kenny Dalglish when Brian Stein and Mick Harford are missing.

Marc North, Mark Stein and Mike Newell will be better players for the experience they have gathered in the last few weeks, and perhaps that should give some comfort to fans who want more goals.

We might also be grateful for the fact that one goal scored in the last three games has been enough to gather five points out of nine. Not so long ago it would have been zero points.

Norwich were adept at closing down space and restricting the Town's attempt to get forward. They caught the Town offside on ten occasions, which contributed nothing to the entertainment but plenty to their own ambitions.

I had the feeling that one goal would change everything — provided the Town scored it. If Norwich had snatched the lead they probably would have held on to it without having to worry too much about pressurising Les Sealey.

Both goalkeepers did well when they had to, with Benstead lucky to escape during the Town's best spell of supremacy.

They controlled most of the first half, and in the tenth minute North's strength took him past Steve Bruce. His lob, hit under pressure, bounced off the bar with Benstead strand-

ed. From the corner Steve Foster stole into space at the near post, but headed wide.

Sealey had to race out of his area to make a decisive tackle when Wayne Biggins burst clear on the break, but Benstead was under more pressure.

He dived full length to keep out a low 20-yard drive from Peter Nicholas and shortly after that Norwich escaped twice within a minute.

Stein dribbled through their rearguard and whipped over a hard low cross which North almost reached on the far post. Ian Culverhouse made the crucial tackle, and from the corner Benstead produced a marvellous save from Foster's header to slip the ball round the post.

Another good run by Stein offered him a shooting chance for a brief second. Norwich bodies blocked the drive, and as the ball ran loose Newell netted. But the linesman's flag was already up for offside, and there was also a suspicion that Newell had handled in controlling the ball.

In the second half Norwich worked even harder to clamp down on any suggestion of open play, and midfielder Mike Phelan had a couple of chances to capitalise on their workmanlike efforts.

The best was when he was clear at the far post to meet a cross by Dale Gordon from the Norwich right wing. Fortunately, Sealey produced the best save of the match, an instinctive stop that defied all logic.

Rob Johnson closed down the danger on another occasion when Phelan was in with a shooting chance, while at the other end Benstead was happy to see a booming drive on the turn by Stein flash an inch or two too high.

In view of the enforced absences of Brian Stein and Mick Harford, 11th place in the First Division is no mean achievement.

The Town were not at their best against Norwich — Ricky Hill, for instance, misses Brian Stein as much as anyone — yet they were well worth the draw.

My thoughts went back to a point David Pleat made the previous week talking about Luton and Spurs. There is plenty of quality at both clubs in terms of good individual players. The difference is that the big money outfits have more of them. And while we were restless at seeing a 0-0 home draw, Liverpool were being beaten at Anfield.



● **OUTNUMBERED:** Mark Stein finds no way through as Norwich protect their goal.



● **CONTRAST OF EMOTIONS:** Mike Newell has just hit the net and he and Marc North are beginning to celebrate the opening goal. Norwich defenders, however, have already begun appealing, and the Town's delight evaporated as the ref and linesman gave offside, and probably handball against Newell as well.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0 NORWICH CITY 0

TOWN: Sealey; Johnson, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Hill, Nicholas, Preece; Mark Stein, Marc North (McDonough, 78 mins), Newell.

NORWICH: Benstead; Culverhouse, Bruce, Butterworth, Spearing; Gordon, Williams (Crook, 75 mins), Phelan, Barham; Drinkell, Biggins.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town nine saved, five wide, one hit the bar and one netted but disallowed for combination of handball and offside against Mike Newell; Norwich eight saved and six wide. Corners: 7-5 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 10,022 — highest so far this season, and first five-figure gate since away fans were banned. It was an increase of 1,228 on Norwich's last league visit, with around 700 youngsters taking advantage of the free admission deal set up by the club and the local media.

REFEREE: Jim Ashworth, Leicestershire — did not have a particularly good game and suffered through not playing the advantage law properly. But he and his linesman were right in ruling out the "goal" by Newell which might have produced a less inhibited match.

ENTERTAINMENT: One for the purists — the only score-less game in the whole of the Football League, and the Town's fifth draw out of the season's first ten matches. But it was a good contest, with Norwich working hard to get a result that pleased them.