

SUPERB DEFIANCE IS TOO MUCH FOR KOP FANS

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures — Mark Richards

86/87 (cnc)
THE DRAW that defied double champions Liverpool on their own Anfield turf, and in front of their unique frenzied fans, goes down in my Luton Town memory bank as one of the greatest matches I have ever seen.

Lack of goals, even after extra time, detracted nothing from a pulsating cup-tie on Monday evening.

Liverpool brought out their league championship trophy and the FA Cup to introduce John Aldridge, their latest signing, to Anfield. The official carrying the cup back to the trophy room might have been more symbolic than he realised — he had only one hand on it.

No praise can be too high for the way the Town set out on their most difficult assignment of the season. The background row over synthetic pitch, away fans ban, and non-arrival for

the first date, helped to provoke an intimidatory atmosphere in the ground.

The image of the lovable Scousers with ready wit and good sportsmanship was swamped by the Kop. They exuded something close to hatred for everyone on the field who was not wearing red.

There was racial abuse, four-letter filth directed at Steve Foster, and continual pressure and obscenity directed at referee Alan Gunn.

In such a highly-charged atmosphere the screaming hordes were scarcely able to take in the evidence of their own narrow vision as the Town coped superbly on a night when so much was stacked against them.

If you want to know the man of the match, the 11 names are listed in the details panel alongside the name of Luton Town. But two men more than any others ensured that Liverpool and their fans were frustrated — Mal Donaghy and Steve Foster.

They were giants in everything they did, but on a night when every Luton player walked tall.

Liverpool's famous mean machine got into gear, pushed forward from all angles, especially down their right through Craig Johnston, and came up against a wall of defiance.

Rob Johnson and Ashley Grimes battled to stop Johnston turning his threat in-

to positive result, Donaghy and Foster stuck to Ian Rush and Paul Walsh like limpets and Peter Nicholas competed strongly against Jan Molby.

It was aggressive, full-blooded stuff, with the crowd often baying for blood. Luton Town had the cheek to match Liverpool's power, and the home fans didn't like it. Referee Gunn also withstood the vocal ferocity, and they didn't like that either.

Liverpool's frustration was showing when Johnstone was booked in the 50th minute for pointless argument against a throw-in decision. Mr Gunn was the son of an unmarried mother, but earned temporary approval later for his cautions on Nicholas, for tripping Walsh, Brian Stein for a foul on Mark Lawrenson and Foster for a mis-timed tackle on Rush.

Mr Gunn infuriated Liverpool in the 65th minute when one of the regular penalty appeals seemed to have more substance about it. Ronny Whelan had burst through with the ball and the pass sent John Wark clear into the area. Johnson made the saving

tackle, and I have seen penalties given for less.

In many ways Liverpool are very poor losers because they are so often good winners, and I think they realised in the 16th minute of extra time that they were doomed to return to a ground and pitch they hate.

That was when Molby struck a 20-yard drive which beat Les Sealey, hit the post, bounced against the goalkeeper's legs, and was cleared by Donaghy.

Liverpool and their fans know that on run of play, and on chances created, they should have won.

The worst miss had come in the 66th minute. Gary Gillespie charged through from the back and sent Wark on a run for goal. Sealey blocked his shot, the ball ran free and Rush, of all people, shot wide of the empty goal, when his 27th of the season should have been in the net.

In the first half Sealey made a difficult save from a bobbling drive by Johnston, flung himself at Alan Hansen's feet to make another stop, and brilliantly turned over a rising drive by Walsh, on the only

occasion the former Town star managed to wriggle free of cover.

The general pattern was one of Liverpool attacking, and becoming more hectic and frustrated by the minute, with the Town playing a classic defensive game, and looking dangerous on the break.

They might even have nicked the result, against the run of play.

Brian Stein, Mike Newell and Mick Harford had few chances to create good openings, yet when they did Liverpool were caught stretched.

The Town often worked the ball well, passing neatly out of defence, and Harford and Newell combined to give Stein a first-half opening. But his shot from the inside left position on the edge of the box carried too little power to bother Grobbelaar.

He made a good catch under the bar from a second-half free kick by Grimes, and produced a spectacular dive in the 64th minute to push a sharp drive by Harford round the post when a shock Town victory was closest.

Extra time, after both sides had given so much on a soft, energy-sapping surface, was remarkable for keeping up the pace for its first 15 minutes.

And after Molby had hit the post and Stein had shot wide at the other end from Harford's headed pass, the Kop howled its disgust at the final whistle.

No thoughts there that they had seen a classic confrontation.

Magnificent defence, apparently, is only appreciated by Anfield's customers when it fails to hold one of the best attacks in the land.

Kenny Dalglish was grudging in his admiration for the Town's performance. He was more concerned at the prospect of returning to Kenilworth Road.

When he sounded off about the pitch and the Town's membership scheme on January 11, he presumably had no idea that he might have to face it again so quickly.

MATCH DETAILS

LIVERPOOL 0 LUTON TOWN 0
(AFTER EXTRA TIME)

LUTON TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Johnson; Hill, Nicholas, Grimes; Brian Stein, Newell, Harford. Subs: Mark Stein and McDonough, not used.

LIVERPOOL: Grobbelaar; Venison, Gillespie, Hansen, Lawrenson; Whelan, Molby, Wark; Johnston, Walsh, Rush. Subs: Ablet and Irvine, not used.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and five wide; Liverpool 12 saved, 16 wide, one hit a post. Corners: 8-7 to Liverpool.

ATTENDANCE: 34,822, with 700 of them Town fans who competed like the team, defiantly, against the odds, in an atmosphere which was often hostile to visitors.

REFEREE: Alan Gunn, Sussex — did marvellously well to withstand the intimidatory clamour from crowd and sometimes from players as Liverpool tried to pressurise him into being a homer.

BOOKED: Peter Nicholas, Brian Stein and Steve Foster for fouls; Craig Johnston of Liverpool for dissent over a throw-in, a sure sign he and his team were getting rattled.

ENTERTAINMENT: A magnificent cup-tie, hard, sometimes physical, with the Town's resolve not to be steam-rolled in a passionate atmosphere tested to the full and rightly triumphant. It was a night that made you proud to be a Luton Town supporter.