

# CHAMPIONS ARE SECOND BEST

87/88

THERE WAS a touch of surprise in the general feeling of satisfaction as Luton Town manager Ray Harford contemplated a thoroughly deserved win over League champions Everton.

His team had varied the style he and they like best, throwing in a surprisingly high assortment of long-ball crosses.

Everton boss Colin Harvey, philosophical and not the moaner Howard Kendall was in a similar situation, gave the Town credit for victory.

"Luton just about edged it on the run of play," he said.

His complaints were directed against his own men. He had warned them that Mick Harford would be a problem, and told them to make sure the big centre forward was kept at long range.

Everton couldn't do that, and Harvey's warning came true, with Harford's aerial power leading to both Town goals.

The Town manager said that his side had won using a tactic they were not really good at. "You were today!" replied Harvey.

The new Everton boss emerged from his first trip to Kenilworth Road as a manager with great credit.

## Reports by Brian Swain Pictures: Gareth Owen

There were no moans about his six injured stars who were out of action. Not a word about the synthetic pitch, except to say that he was glad Everton had now finished with Loftus Road and Kenilworth Road for another season.

And there was not a word of complaint about Mick Harford's physical contribution to the game, although Everton players were not as reticent.

Skipper Kevin Ratcliffe thought Harford should have been sent off. He unloaded Peter Reid with a late high tackle, seemed to kick Dave Watson in retaliation, for which he escaped with a booking, and also tangled with Alan Harper.

But if Harford was the major cause of unsettling Everton in terms of strength, there was still a lot of the old Luton flair on show as well.

I made Harford man of the match for the decisive contributions which led to the goals that forced Everton out into the open.

But you could make out a case for several other Town players deserving the accolade.

Tim Breacker is in a purple patch. Right winger Micky Weir was a spectator as Breacker and Ricky Hill stretched Everton's left flank.

I want to see an old-fashioned winger in action for Luton Town, although on Saturday's show it seems that Weir might have to wait for his chance.

Breacker's defending used to be suspect against men running at him. But that side of his game was well on song again against Everton, and his attacking down the flank has become a potent threat to opponents. He crossed the ball like a good winger.

Danny Wilson is settling into his centre midfield role sweetly. He is not as dramatic as Peter Nicholas was, but the eye for the interception is sharp, and his probing passes were a major cause of Everton's problems.

Brian Stein recaptured the old flair, and his second goal in consecutive games was no less than he deserved.

Best of all, the whole team responded to the obvious difficulty after Everton snatched an early lead.

With both first-choice strikers out through injury — Wayne Clarke failed a fitness test and Graeme Sharp was ruled out in midweek — Everton recalled Neil Adams and Adrian Heath as front-runners, and kicked off with four men in midfield.

The game was less than five minutes old when Ashley Grimes, another Town success, was adjudged to have fouled the combative Reid, near the touch-line and about ten yards inside the Town half.

Harper lofted the free kick diagonally into the penalty area, Heath jumped between Mal Donaghy and Les Sealey to confuse both, and Neil Pointon lashed in a stunning goal from an angle.

Everton then pulled back Adams, leaving Heath as a lonely striker, with five in midfield.

Spurs use the tactic to good

effect, but Heath is no Clive Allen. Everton's plan was to swamp midfield, try to hold the 1-0 advantage, and with a little luck pinch another goal on the break.

It would have worked against less determined teams than the Town. They delighted their boss by stepping up a gear after the early shock, and the equaliser was well deserved.

It nearly arrived in the 15th minute when Stein robbed Harper down the Town's left. The cross was delivered early, and Harford's powerful header brought Neville Southall to a thrilling diving save.

Three minutes later the Town levelled from another teasing cross, this time knocked in by Ashley Grimes.

His response to Everton's attempt to stifle midfield was to join the attack, and the old left foot bomber found Harford for a knock-down which Stein converted instantly from just inside the penalty area.

For a spell after that the game became more physical,

with Harford, Reid, Wilson, Van den Hauwe and Breacker all relishing a man's game.

I thought Mr Gunn might have acted earlier to stamp it out, but the heat died after a 29th-minute incident. Watson fouled Harford, the Luton man retaliated while both were down, and Heath contributed a bit of rabbit to complain to the ref.

All three players were booked, and when we got back to football the Town took command.

A raking move by Harford, Stein and Hill put David Preece through, but his header went straight at Southall.

Everton were lucky in the 38th minute, after they had failed to clear a corner properly. Steve Foster's flick sent Stein through, Harper tangled with him, both fell and penalty appeals went unheeded. I've seen them given for less.

Perhaps Everton made the mistake of inwardly settling for a draw, and their long back passes early in the second half contributed frustration, but not entertainment.

But with Hill hitting top form the Town turned on the attacking power, and Everton's plans were wrecked six minutes after the break.

Donaghy moved up to support a Town throw-in and hammered a long cross from the left into the crowded Everton penalty area.

Van Den Hauwe, under pressure from Harford, headed weakly, and Hill, following up down the inside right position, drilled his shot into the corner of the net.

I worried that Harford might have been offside, but he had had the sense to pull well clear to give Hill a view of goal, and Everton had no complaints.

The goal lifted the game, because Everton had to chase it. Harvey took off Adams and

Pointon, sent on big sub Derek Mountfield and Ian Marshall, and changed to conventional 4-3-3.

Mark Stein and Rob Johnson replaced Meka Nwajobi and Preece, and we had a fascinating finale, in which either side might have scored.

Sealey saved the bonuses with two vital stops, smothering Trevor Steven when he was given too much space in the box, and then tipping Watson's header from a corner over the bar with a save that almost defied belief.

"I suppose we might be going home with a draw," said Harvey.

"But over the 90 minutes I've no complaints about the result. We were beaten twice by Mick Harford for goals, and that settled it."

## Match details

### LUTON TOWN 2 EVERTON 1 HALF-TIME: 1-1

**LUTON TOWN:** Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Hill, Danny Wilson, Preece (Johnson, 79 mins); Brian Stein, Nwajobi (Mark Stein, 59 mins), Harford.

**EVERTON:** Southall; Harper, Ratcliffe, Watson, Van Den Hauwe; Reid, Steven, Adams (Marshall, 59 mins), Snodin, Pointon (Mountfield, 82 mins); Heath.

**THE GOALS:** Neil Pointon for Everton, four minutes, angled drive after the Town failed to clear Alan Harper's free kick; Brian Stein for the Town, 18 minutes, crisp shot after Mick Harford headed down cross by Ashley Grimes; Ricky Hill for the Town, 51 minutes, with a similar goal, made by Mal Donaghy's cross and Harford's winning ways in the air forced Van Den Hauwe into a poor header.

**OTHER STRIKES:** Town eight saved and three wide; Everton four saved and three wide. Corners: 8-6 to the Town.

**ATTENDANCE:** 8,124, the day's lowest in the First Division and 3,000 down on the crowd for Everton's visit last season.

**REFEREE:** Alan Gunn, Burgess Hill — did well, with minimum use of the yellow card to calm down possible trouble, and certainly no homer. Alan Harper's 38th-minute push on Brian Stein looked a clear penalty to Luton eyes.

**BOOKED:** Dave Watson and Mick Harford, for a foul and retaliation in the same incident; Adrian Heath for dissent — he called the ref a homer.

**ENTERTAINMENT:** The soccer, and the result, that deserves better support. Early indications that Mick Harford was on a high were taken up with gusto, and the mixture of smooth passing and aerial ammo for Harford left Everton admitting the Town deserved to win.