

DEPUTY SHINES AND GIVES BOSS A PROBLEM

87/98

THE BEST WIN of his First Division management career leaves Luton Town boss Ray Harford with a major problem today as he plans for Saturday's trip to Hillsborough, Sheffield.

Can he leave out two-goal matchwinner Mark Stein, the late replacement for Mick Harford, who did more than anyone to shatter Newcastle?

Manager and player have had a prickly relationship, with Stein unhappy about being a near-permanent sub.

The boss, in turn, has had a go at the 22-year-old striker over his attitude behind the scenes.

"I wasn't a rebel, but I did pick up a lot of fines for little breaches of club discipline," admitted Stein.

"I hope now my game against Newcastle has given the boss a lot more to think about. But the result wasn't just about me — the whole team played well.

"I suppose my future is still in the lap of the gods, but if I

Reports by Brian Swain Pictures: Gareth Owen

get a fair crack of the whip I will be happy to stay with Luton."

The manager cheerfully admitted that the one-time problem boy had been brilliant after being pitched into the side two hours before kick-off when Mick Harford went down with flu.

"The penny has dropped with Stein. Perhaps he is now the player he has always promised to be."

With Meka Nwajiobi also getting on the scoresheet, as replacement for Micky Weir, who pulled a hamstring in training, the Town's performance was a throw-back to the days of two or three seasons ago.

Without a tall target man in attack they had to rely on quick accurate passing, and the way they did it delighted the boss.

Equally pleasing was that having reached half time looking a mile ahead in class, but only one up, the team kept the pattern going.

Poor Newcastle, despite the return of Brazilian striker Mirandinha, never looked like competing seriously.

Les Sealey had to make only one real save, racing out as a sweeper to tackle Paul Goddard after the defence was caught square by a through-ball.

A hopeful drive by Neil McDonald was Newcastle's only other shot on target.

Luckless Gary Kelly, 20, deputy for injured Martin Thomas, was given a pounding at the other end, and the four goals came from 22 scoring attempts.

Manager Willie McFaul.

once a good goalkeeper himself but now under fire on Tyneside for not replacing Thomas, ducked out of the post-match Press conference.

He kept his men locked in the dressing room for 40 minutes, and Mirandinha said: "He was very upset. But so were all of us. It was my worst game since I came here, and the worst I have seen the team play."

He did not blame the pitch, but found it unreal to play without the traditional Geordie support that normally follows the team.

He added: "Luton played very well and deserved to win. But we didn't play like we can."

Newcastle's problems started in defence, where even Glenn Roeder, normally so elegant and reliable, and formerly a player on the Omniturf at Loftus Road, was reduced to a bag of nerves by nippy attackers and a barrage of incisive passes.

PRESSURE

And if Mark Stein deserved his headlines for being close to a hat-trick on his second full appearance of the season, he was right to comment on the part others played.

Newcastle were put under so much pressure that they rarely threatened the Town defence, and the one who made most of that was Tim Breacker.

He and Danny Wilson mercilessly exposed inexperienced left back Brian Tinnion, who was eventually put out of his misery through substitution.

ON THE WEEKEND WHEN they disclosed the cost of the ban on away fans at Kenilworth Road (see page 32) the Town had some encouragement from Saturday's attendance.

The 7,638 gate was a long way short of break-even, but the cut-price offer to try to attract more families to the ground had some success.

Boys or girls under 16 are offered free admission to the terrace, worth £3, if they are accompanied by a paying adult. The club had 91 takers, and hope for more as fans get used to the system.

The only condition is that the offer has to be taken up by 1 pm on matchday via the ticket office at the top of Kenilworth Road.

Wilson played a major role in giving the Town the crucial early domination, aided and abetted by the crafty experience of Ian Allison.

At 30, he sees the right pass to play instinctively, and the one he curled in for the second goal was a peach.

Allinson made contributions to all the goals to justify the manager's decision to change a winning team after the Littlewoods Cup success.

Ipswich can be pleased that they will not have to face the former Arsenal man at Portman Road on Tuesday.

STRENGTH

The midfield trio, with Darren McDonough the defensive strength and Wilson and Allinson driving forward, was too good a combination for Newcastle.

After trying four men in the middle, and being outplayed, they made a late switch with Darren Jackson and Paul Gascoigne, trying to get upfield, and were just as pathetic.

The winning margin could have been more, with Newcastle lucky to escape several times, including once when a scramble saw a Brian Stein shot deflected onto a post.

Mirandinha, with no real support, hardly ever threatened. He made two runs, with Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy easily blocking both.

There was a 30-yard drive which tweaked his hamstring again and flew as wide as the gulf in class between the sides.

Newcastle visitors sat almost

open-mouthed in admiration of the Town's speed and accuracy of passing, with the short-ball game cutting through with apparent ease.

It was a day when the pattern suited the team, and the men combined to make it devastating. The goals were typical:

● **TWO MINUTES:** Wilson forces Roeder into a hasty clearance and the Town win their second corner. Newcastle get the ball away only as far as Allinson, and his diagonal cross from the right goes off a Newcastle head for Mark Stein to smash in an angled drive for his first goal of the season.

● **62 MINUTES:** Allinson attacks down the left, draws two defenders and curls in a dipping pass towards the six-yard line. Mark Stein anticipates it before the goalkeeper, inches ahead of him, and flicks in a goal that looks deceptively simple.

● **75 MINUTES:** Allinson's corner from the right leaves Newcastle in total disarray yet again, and Mark Stein shoots for a hat-trick. The ball looks like missing the far post by inches until Nwajiobi pops up to deflect it into the net.

● **88 MINUTES:** Allinson puts Mark Stein away down the left wing. The cross is hit accurately to the far post, and brother Brian, enjoying the luxury of tormenting a poor defence, heads his fourth goal of the season.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 4 NEWCASTLE UTD 0
HALF-TIME: 1-0

LUTON TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Allinson, McDonough, Wilson; Mark Stein, Brian Stein, Nwajiobi. Subs: Johnson and Harvey, not needed.

NEWCASTLE: Kelly; Anderson, Peter Jackson, Roeder, Tinnion (O'Neill, 68 mins); Wharton, McDonald, Gascoigne, Darren Jackson; Goddard, Mirandinha. Other sub: Cornwell, not used.

THE GOALS: Mark Stein, twice, two and 62 minutes, both from passes by Ian Allinson; Meka Nwajiobi, 75 mins, from cross-shot by Mark Stein, 88 minutes from a cross by his brother.

OTHER STRIKES: Town ten saved, seven wide, one hit the post; Newcastle two saved, four wide. Corners: 10-3 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 7,638 — marginally better than for the visits of Coventry and Wimbledon, but 1,600 down on the corresponding game last season and 2,400 fewer than the last time Newcastle fans were openly admitted.

REFEREE: Mike James, Horsham — had an easy game, with neither team causing him any problems.

ENTERTAINMENT: One to remember for Town fans, on a day when they might have feared the worst after the late withdrawals of Mick Harford and Micky Weir. Mark Stein, who got fed up with being a near-permanent sub, grabbed his chance with both feet, and has set his manager an interesting team selection problem for Saturday.



● **NIGHT EXTRA:** Brian Stein rises above his marker in the closing seconds of the game to head in the Town's fourth from a cross by his brother.