

SKILL IS THE ANSWER TO BRUTE FORCE

Barclays League

THE SECOND AWAY win of the season in the First Division on a ground where they had previously won only once in their history, was due reward for a superb disciplined team performance by Luton Town at Hillsborough.

Home boss Howard Wilkinson thought the Town deserved to win, but that the result was a little generous.

For Town manager Ray Harford it was a day which brought satisfaction for all kinds of reasons.

Top of my list is the way the Town's backroom staff had watched Wednesday during a run of five consecutive victories and accurately picked out their weaknesses and strong points.

The manager had joined in that task, and the homework paid off handsomely, despite the continued absence of Ricky Hill, David Preece, Mick Harford and Micky Weir.

Sheffield Wednesday, the team that believes in bombarding the opposition, were left shell-shocked and eventually demoralised as determined professionalism broke their hearts.

FLUKE

The bare facts underline Wilkinson's point: Mark Stein scored a fluke goal to put the Town ahead, Wednesday missed a penalty, Les Sealey made two vital saves and the best goal we have seen for a long time finished it.

Wednesday did a lot of furious attacking, and there were some narrow squeaks as the Town took a battering from a team that tried to make height and weight count in the penalty area.

The travelling fans were going through agonies as the Town survived Wednesday tactics which were exactly what Mr Harford had forecast.

The temptation is to give all credit to a marvellous defence, in which Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy were outstanding.

Yet it was a day when every man, including the strikers, had to defend, and they all did it well.

**SHEFF WED..0
LUTON TN....2**

Foster concentrated on the aerial threat of Colin West, with Donaghy looking after Lee Chapman, and doing it brilliantly despite an elbow in the ribs which made breathing difficult for him from the 40th minute onwards.

Tim Breacker bottled up Tony Galvin so well that he was taken off with 20 minutes to go.

Wednesday, again as predicted by the Town boss, decided that right winger Mark Chamberlain might be their trump card.

He threatened a lot and achieved a little, and if Ashley Grimes had to battle hard to hold him, the danger was snuffed out when Ian Allinson or Danny Wilson did the covering job.

Darron McDonough played a part that might easily be overlooked, in close support of the central defenders.

Wednesday's near-frenzy of attacking led only to frustration, and the Town looked a much more classy outfit when they attacked on the break.

The Stein brothers pulled out wide, leaving Wednesday's central men unsure about following them or having no one to mark in the middle, and Meka Nwajiobi might have had two more goals to further press his claims for a regular place in the side.

Wednesday compounded their own failings with a lack of composure in the penalty area. Brute force, and not too much finesse, got the result it deserved.

Mr Harford summed up: "It was the Wednesday of old. If you stand up to them their

belief starts to go, and once they're short on belief they're not so good."

Sealey helped to destroy Wednesday's confidence with a vital save in the 17th minute. Gary Megson jinked into a shooting chance, but Sealey was an unbeatable last line of defence.

Within seconds Wednesday were caught on the break when Mark Stein's searching cross-field pass put Nwajiobi clear in the inside right channel. Martin Hodge emulated Sealey by deflecting the shot round the post with a dive at the forward's feet.

The goal the Town threatened with their crisp counter-attacking followed a determined run with the ball by Wilson and a pass to the right wing.

Mark Stein cheerfully admitted later that his intention was to drive in a low hard cross, and hope someone would get a touch.

Poor Hodge thought the same, and stood crestfallen when the apparent centre, hit with a lot of power, whizzed in front of his knees and into the far corner of the net.

Donaghy was still suffering from an injury which caused a long treatment stoppage when his mis-timed tackle on Chapman, almost on the goal-line and near the edge of the penalty area, gave Wednesday their equaliser chance.

With Mel Sterland, their penalty expert, out through injury, West had volunteered to take the responsibility. Even by the standard of Vicarage Road, where he used to perform, his 12-yard shot was laughable, flying high into the terracing.

Wednesday's belief slumped another notch after that, and while they never gave up trying the Town's defence was good enough to get by, with occasional alarms.

Wednesday attacked like a bulldozing pack of rugby for-

wards. The Town hit back with the precision of real artists.

Sealey had to make another superb save to prevent Chapman heading an equaliser, but the killer goal ended the contest in the 80th minute.

It was so good both managers applauded. "It was lovely — about 20 passes and a perfect shot," said Mr Harford.

"It was terrific," agreed Mr Wilkinson.

The move swept the length of the field, with Breaker delivering the final cross for Allinson, one of three Town men ready for the flourish, to crash in his first goal for the Town.

It might have been 3-0 in the final minute when Mark Stein put Nwajiobi clear. With only a demoralised goalkeeper in opposition, his shot was on a par with West's penalty kick from near the same spot.

But there was hardly any department in which Wednesday could claim parity with the Town on Saturday.

DETAILS

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

SHEFFIELD WED: Hodge; Jacobs, Pearson, Madden, Worthington; Megson, Proctor, Galvin (Marwood, 72 mins); Chamberlain, Chapman, West. Other sub: Fee, not used.

THE GOALS: Mark Stein, 36 minutes, with a low intended cross; Ian Allinson, 80 minutes, at the end of a breathtaking Town passing movement down the right.

OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved and nine wide; Wednesday eight saved, seven wide, including a penalty. Corners: 5-5.

REFEREE: Ron Bridges, Lancashire. A bit finicky at times and seemed to be keen to make an impact.

BOOKINGS: Ian Allinson, harshly for a foul on Mark Chamberlain; Danny Wilson, needlessly, for dissent over that decision.

ATTENDANCE: 16,950 — how does a team half as good as the Town get twice the following.

ENTERTAINMENT: Top class for the Town fans who made the trip, although their hearts were in their mouths for a long time until Allinson's goal settled it.