

Battle-weary Town beaten

COVENTRY CITY.....4
LUTON TOWN.....0

AFTER SUFFERING the heaviest defeat of the season, Luton Town had a volunteer scapegoat at Highfield Road on Tuesday evening — manager Ray Harford.

He blamed himself for being too ambitious in his tactics against Coventry City.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have played three at the front to open it up," he said. "But I thought we could score more goals than they could. And to be fair, when we were two

MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Sealey; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy, Grimes; Wilson, McDonough, Rob Johnson (Cobb, 72 mins); Mark Stein, Harford, Allinson (Black, 69 mins).

COVENTRY: Ogrizovic; Phillips, Kilcline (Rodger, 66 mins), Peake, Downs; Emerson, Sedgley, Smith; Bannister, Speedie, Regis. Other sub: Bennett, not needed.

THE GOALS: Steve Sedgley, 34 mins; Gary Bannister, 38 mins; Brian Kilcline, penalty, 60 mins; Cyrille Regis, 64 mins.

OTHER STRIKES: Town four saved and two wide; Coventry five saved and four wide, and one netted but disallowed. Corners: 5-4 to the Town.

REFEREE: David Allison, Lancaster. Did well to keep the game flowing.

BOOKED: Ashley Grimes, for the sixth time this season, for a foul on Speedie.

ATTENDANCE: 13,723, Coventry's lowest in the league this season, but on a bleak wet and windy night.

ENTERTAINMENT: Too one-sided in the end for Town fans to enjoy. Perhaps we all need a rest from football.

BRIAN SWAIN REPORTS FROM HIGHFIELD ROAD

down at half time it could easily have been 3-3 or even 5-5."

Coventry boss John Sillett agreed with that, having seen his team become the first to do the double over the Town this season.

I felt the major problem for the Town was a mixture of fatigue and inability to cope with an appalling pitch. Half the surface at Coventry was a wet beach, and most of the rest was clogging mud.

The Town tried to use their normal short-passing game, and it was bogged down. When it came to the long ball style, with midfield often by-passed, Coventry were better at it.

Few Town players hit anything like top form, with the notable exception of Mick Harford, who went looking for the ball all over the field.

That was partly because the service he got was so poor, and with Mark Stein struggling on a pitch made for beefy musclemen Coventry looked the more likely to score.

Ian Allinson was used on the left wing with limited success, and the defence was stretched too often for comfort by Coventry's biff-bang approach.

I thought the major difference was that they had three potential match-winners in attack, compared to the Town's one.

David Speedie, Cyrille Regis and Gary Bannister, making his home debut after his £300,000 transfer from QPR, looked more menacing than anything the Town could produce.

Yet as Mr Harford pointed out, the Town could have been two up before 34 minutes of good even competition ended with Coventry's first goal.

Barely a minute had been played when Tim Breacker's long ball was flicked on by Harford to Stein. He wriggled clear of defenders, but from an angle found himself closed down by giant goalkeeper Steve Ogrizovic.

Harford went closer, stretching to get a toe to a low cross by Ian Allinson, but the ball skidded wide. Coventry, however, could point to a Steve Sedgley shot

over the bar from ten yards, and a clearance off the line by Mal Donaghy from David Smith.

The Town's midfield failed to cut out a succession of long passes to both flanks for Bannister, Speedie and Smith to chase, and while Cyrille Regis got little change out of Steve Foster and Mal Donaghy, he was able to make one decisive contribution with a superb final goal.

There was little sign that the battle-weary Town, again without Brian Stein, had the ability to fight back for league points in their fifth game in 15 days once Coventry took the lead in the 34th minute.

It started with left back Greg Downs making an overlap and crossing to the far side of the box. Speedie headed the ball back into the danger area, Foster's head half-cleared, and the ball dropped perfectly for Sedgley to hammer in a low drive from 20 yards through a crowd of players.

Four minutes later Ashley Grimes brought the stadium to its feet with a horrific-looking tackle on Speedie, with studs going in over the top of the ball and into the little Scot's shin.

The crowd bayed for a red card, and a sending-off would not have surprised me. The challenge looked awful, until it was remembered that Grimes had been beaten on his right, and had got his own legs into a bit of a tangle in the attempt to use his left foot.

The Irish international escaped with a yellow card, but it was only part of the punishment. Coventry worked the free kick, 20 yards from goal, out to Smith on the right wing and his pulled-back pass was met by Bannister's crisp shot into the net.

The Town showed signs of hitting back in the first ten minutes after the interval, but a third goal on the hour killed them. Breacker had cleared off the line from Regis and ever-willing Harford was back helping out defence when his rash challenge on Emerson conceded a penalty.

Brian Kilcline, for the second time this season, beat Les Sealey from the spot, and as the Town tried to chase the game they were caught stretched four minutes later.

Regis tricked Donaghy near the halfway line, raced 40 yards with the ball, always ahead of defenders chasing back, and cracked in a beauty.