

HOUDINI ACT CLIPS CANARIES' WINGS

EVEN MANAGER Ray Harford was prepared to admit that the Town had "a little bit of luck" when they stole a point at Carrow Road.

With three minutes to go, after a lethargic display which showed all the signs of a Littlewoods Cup hang-over, they were two down and on the way to their sixth consecutive away defeat.

But 19-year-old David Oldfield, sent on as a sub in a team which was already short of four first-choice men, injected the pace and sheer enthusiasm that had been missing for so long.

NORWICH CITY.....2
LUTON TOWN.....2

He laid on an 87th minute goal for Mark Stein, then won the injury-time penalty from which Danny Wilson blasted the equaliser.

"How did we lose that?" asked Norwich manager David Stringer. "They were dead and buried, I think their goals were Luton's only efforts on target."

He was right. Norwich always looked the more enterprising side, although Town boss Harford thought his men's display was better than it had been in a lot of away games this season.

REGULARS MISSING

The Town kicked off without Mick Harford, David Preece and Brian Stein. At half-time Mal Donaghy had to be taken off.

Mark Stein replaced his brother, Ashley Grimes and Ian Allinson were recalled, and Marvin Johnson went on as sub for Donaghy.

Personally, I felt that the Wembley heroics would be all I could want from the team this season, and if players were leg-weary and tired, it was hardly surprising.

Norwich would have made the points safe but for another good display by Andy Dibble and their own failings when they got close to the penalty area.

They were a little nervous after Stringer had told them that victory was vital to prevent the possibility of being sucked into the play-off zone.

Ruel Fox, wide on their right, was a flashy attacker on the wing, but Rob Johnson fought to contain him, and most of Fox's work was wasted by his own poor final ball, and some sensible covering in the centre of defence.

The Allinson/Stein attack combination looked toothless and for all Wilson's hard work the midfield rarely gained mastery of the opposition's.

COOL UNDER PRESSURE

But sensible back-tracking forced Norwich to confine most of their goal attempts to long-range optimism and at half-time the Town deserved to be level if only for their coolness under pressure.

They might even have been ahead against the run of play, because they had created two half-chances.

Rob Johnson's precise through-ball gave Stein a run on the break. Goalkeeper Bryan Gunn and central defender Andy Linighan collided with each other and Stein. With the striker recovering, but forced wide, his shot was hacked away by Tony Spearing for a corner.

Johnson instigated the other move which gave the Town a chance to open the scoring, with a ball from left to right which unhinged the Norwich defence.

Tim Breacker made ground to collect the pass, and from his cross Allinson, under pressure from Ian Butterworth, hammered a marvellous volley, which would have been perfection if it had been a foot lower.

But at the other end Dibble twice threw himself bravely into the action to save from Kevin Drinkell when Norwich threatened.

With Ricky Hill still searching for his old form and



● **DEBUT SMASHER:** David Oldfield whacks in his first league goal, the equaliser against Watford on Monday.

fitness, and Kingsley Black suffering from a chest infection and exhaustion after his crowded week, the Town looked better at defending than attacking.

PERFECT CROSS

But that changed six minutes into the second half when for once the speedy Fox delivered a perfect cross. Drinkell burst through the middle and went full-length to meet it with a spectacular header, for a goal of genuine quality.

And 12 minutes later it seemed to be all over when Marvin Johnson, sub for Donaghy, was punished for his inexperience.

He tried to pass back from outside the penalty area and Trevor Putney anticipated, collected, rounded Dibble and scored from an acute angle.

Johnson refused to allow that to rattle him, and settled down beside Foster to continue his First Division education with admirable perseverance.

Four minutes after the goal Oldfield was sent on to replace Allinson, and he at least was prepared to chase everything.

But the midfield service was patchy, at best, and Nor-

wich ought to have gone further ahead. Robert Fleck headed wide from a cross by Wayne Biggins, then mis-kicked completely two yards from goal, before having a header saved.

LATE REPLY

It seemed nothing more than slight consolation when the Town scored with three minutes to go. Oldfield chased a clearance, veered to the left, and whacked over a low centre. Stein converted from close range, and suddenly the Norwich nerves were exposed.

Dibble saved when Fox should have made it 3-1 and with the game nearly two minutes into stoppage time Wilson and Hill mounted a central last-ditch attack.

Hill's headed pass sent Oldfield galloping into the penalty area, Gunn had a rush of blood and charged out to flatten the young striker with a crazy body-check.

Mr Stringer had no complaints about the award of the penalty, and Wilson, cool and composed, thundered in the equaliser, his third from the spot this season.

Neutral Pressmen asked Mr Harford about the Town's casual approach. He was cheerfully frank in his reply: "If you thought that was casual you should have seen some of our other away games. At least we looked competent and safe for a long time."

"I agree it looked like an end of season game. Both teams were all right when they had the ball but as soon as they lost it, it was too much of an effort to get it back again."

"We were without some of our senior players, and it is to their credit that our lads didn't let their heads drop when Norwich got the first goal."

"And it has been a long hard season — with cup-ties we have played more games than anyone else in the First Division."

THE MATCH DETAILS

LUTON TOWN: Dibble; Breacker, Foster, Donaghy (M. Johnson 45 mins), R. Johnson; Hill, Wilson, Grimes, Black; Allinson (Oldfield, 67 mins), M. Stein.

NORWICH: Gunn; Culverhouse, Linighan, Butterworth, Spearing; Fox, Goss, Putney, Phelan; Drinkell (Biggins 60 mins), Fleck. Other sub: Gordon, not used.

THE GOALS: Kevin Drinkell header for Norwich, 51 mins; Trevor Putney angled shot for Norwich, 63 mins; Mark Stein for the Town 87 mins; Danny Wilson penalty for the Town, two minutes into injury time.

OTHER STRIKES: Town one blocked and six wide; Norwich six saved and five wide. Corners: 5-4 to Norwich.

REFEREE: Tony Ward, London.

ATTENDANCE: 12,700.

ENTERTAINMENT: End of season fare, lifted by the Town's astonishing recovery in the last three minutes.