

HUNGRY LIONS ARE TREATED TO A FEAST

Reports: Brian Swain — Pictures Josh Levy

HAVING PRESSED THE self-destruct button to concede three goals in seven minutes, Luton Town turned on decent football at The Den when it was too late to matter.

Manager Ray Harford was able to point out that in quality of play the Town were not so second best as the 3-1 defeat suggests.

But he also admitted that teams who go three up before half-time can afford to let the opposition enjoy themselves to some degree.

Millwall cashed in on their good fortune when schoolboy defending gave them two goals in four minutes. They added a third three minutes later with a 25-yarder that no defence can legislate for.

The manager, fiercely loyal to his players, raised a smile in the Press room by saying that Millwall looked wobbly when the Town pulled one back. There was only two minutes left when Danny Wilson headed his third goal in four games.

A Town reply early in the second half might have made a difference, but the points had already been thrown away by slipshod defending.

The absence of Mick Harford left the Town attack more threat than achievement, despite some promising work by Roy Wegerle and David Oldfield.

Significantly, the Town's best scoring attempt before their goal had been a curling drive by defender John

Dreyer, just before the interval.

No visiting team has yet taken three points home from The Den this season. Nottingham Forest came closest with a 2-2 draw.

The atmosphere, in one of the less attractive parts of London, is still nearly overpowering. Kenilworth Road crowds should sample it to get some idea of how home support can lift a team.

The roar was nearly continuous, almost menacing, and Millwall's power football was the response the customers wanted.

SIMPLE SOCCER

It was simple, mainly long ball, and backed by a commitment and determination that deserved to win.

Above all it was effective, with twin strikers Teddy Sheringham and Tony Cascarino using strength, speed and skill.

The Town, for all the pretty football they played when it was too late, looked soft by comparison.

Having lost twice on the trot, Millwall were well wound up. I met an old friend in the Press room before the game and said I thought the Town had struck lucky with their timing, arriving at The Den when the Millwall bubble might have burst.

He smiled knowingly — "And we were thinking how glad we are it's Luton coming here today and not someone like Wimbledon."

It turned out to be the Lions' day because the Town contributed their own uncharacteristic soft touch when the heat came on.

They had a let-off in the ninth minute, when Cascarino was stopped at the expense of a corner. The clearance was indecisive, the ball was knocked back across the face of the goal and Cascarino headed against a post.

The Town were settling into a pattern that had been so successful at Leeds three days earlier — calm defending and counter-attacks designed to get Oldfield and Wegerle into the other penalty area.

It might well have worked but for Millwall's crushing domination midway through the first half. With 17 minutes gone Marvin Johnson dithered over a clearance ten yards outside his own penalty area. With Cascarino cutting off the route for a back pass, Johnson tried to play his way out of trouble with a short square pass to Steve Foster.

Teddy Sheringham saw it coming, nipped in to take the ball from Foster, and coolly moved forward and buried the shot past Les Sealey.

Four minutes later a corner was not dealt with, and as the ball was returned Oldfield's clumsy challenge upended the tricky Darren Morgan. Kevin O'Callaghan blasted in the penalty.

By the 24th minute it was 3-0, with Danny Wilson's obstruction of O'Callaghan costing him a yellow card and the Town a goal. The free kick was rolled square and Ian Dawes lashed in a 25-yarder. It was the sort of effort that could have gone anywhere, but this was a day when Millwall could do little wrong.

The crowd was baying for blood by then, and the Town did well to regain composure and get back to something like good form.

But the attack was toothless, with Oldfield and Wegerle seeming to me to be too lonely.

Wegerle's use of space was always encouraging, but Oldfield shot wide from a long ball by Foster and Marvin Johnson headed over from a corner.

The trouble was that the game was all over by half-time unless the Town could get a quick breakthrough.

Defensively, they got organised when it was too late, but the back four was sorted out after the first-half shambles.

Wilson continued to buzz throughout, and was my man of the match. Steve Williams, still an enigma, produced some clever passes without stamping any real authority on the midfield. Millwall put two men onto Kingsley Black when he threatened, and the Town's raiding had a haphazard and sporadic look about it.

I wanted Black and Hill to get into the penalty area

more than they did, but with their three-goal cushion Millwall were smart enough to turn the game around.

They began to look like an away team, allowing the Town to attack and then looking for the breaks when the visitors were stretched.

And if it was even in terms of possession, Millwall looked sharper when they did get forward. They were also very strong, with George Lawrence too physical with a high-boot challenge on Julian James that earned a caution.

James, after a traumatic week, can look back on his games at Leeds and Millwall with some satisfaction, and is obviously one to watch and anticipate with some pleasure.

Dreyer, despite occasional lapses, is also learning fast, and Marvin Johnson turned in a remarkable performance. He buckled down well to the difficult task of putting his crucial mistake behind him.

But for all their equality of possession in the second half the Town hardly looked like scoring three goals, a feat they have not achieved since the Littlewoods Cup final, 21 matches ago.

Sadly, their first Division One goal at The Den was of little importance, although it was a clever one, with Wilson timing a run and a header to perfection from an angled free kick by Williams.

Match Details

**MILLWALL 3
LUTON TOWN 1**
(Half-time: 3-0)

88/89

TOWN: Sealey; James (R. Johnson, 75 mins), Foster, M. Johnson, Dreyer; Hill, Wilson, Williams, Black; Wegerle, Oldfield. Other sub: Grimes.

MILLWALL: Horne; Stevens, Thompson, McLeary, Dawes; Lawrence, Briley, Morgan, O'Callaghan; Sheringham, Cascarino. Subs: Salmon, Ruddock.

THE GOALS: Teddy Sheringham, 17 minutes after Marvin Johnson played Steve Foster into trouble; Kevin O'Callaghan penalty, 21 minutes, after David Oldfield barged into Darren Morgan; Ian Dawes, 24 minutes, 25-yard scorcher following a free kick. Danny Wilson header for the Town, 88 minutes, from Steve Williams free kick.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved and four wide; Millwall six saved, three wide, one hit a post. Corners: 7-4 to Millwall.

REFEREE: Keren Barrett, Coventry — had a good game.

ATTENDANCE: 12,511 — The Den's lowest of the season following two consecutive Millwall defeats. But they didn't half get behind their team.

ENTERTAINMENT: Home fans loved it. Defensive suicide made it agony for Town fans.