

STILL MORE THREAT THAN ACHIEVEMENT

LUCKY TO BE ONLY one down at the interval — Coventry are convinced they were cheated out of at least one other goal — Luton Town did enough at Highfield Road to suggest that they can move up the First Division table.

But their confidence needs to be lifted. And only goals can do that for a team which has the poorest striking record in the division, equalled only by bottom club Newcastle.

SEARCH FOR TALENT

Manager Ray Harford went to Maine Road, Manchester, in the search for more firepower. He missed little that he didn't already know in the match at Coventry.

The Town defence, despite the injury absences of Tim Breacker, John Dreyer and Darron McDonough, will do the right job for him.

Steve Foster was troubled by a neck injury, but battled through, although Coventry's high balls forward for Cyrille Regis, particularly in the first half, caused a problem or two.

Rob Johnson was a composed and hard-working right back, and his ability to get forward and deliver dangerous crosses deserved more reward.

Ashley Grimes was steady and dependable, and Marvin Johnson is learning fast in the hardest school in the world.

Behind them Les Sealey, knowing that Alec Chamberlain is earning race notices from coaches in reserve games, had another impressive game.

Highfield Road customers believe their cash pays for the right to dish out stick to men who return to play against the Sky Blues.

Sealey would have had the last laugh if the Town had turned their second-half equality into one decent strike.

Controversy came in a minute of hectic activity after the Town had looked bright and alert in the early stages.

Mick Harford, back after injury, had a shot saved after the ball ran loose on the edge of the penalty area from an attack launched by Rob Johnson, Kingsley Black and Danny Wilson.

Sealey smothered an attempted shot by Regis after the striker had roared onto an over-the-top ball that Foster misjudged. And Coventry were sure

that they scored at least once, and perhaps twice, between the 21st and 22nd minutes.

Their fullbacks were finding too much space for comfort through an indecisive Town midfield, and a series of crosses put the Town under pressure.

From one David Speedie headed powerfully for goal, and Sealey dived to grab the ball on — or was it behind? — the line. Coventry's appeals for a goal were rejected, but they were redoubled a few seconds later.

A drive by Gary Bannister from the edge of the area beat Sealey's left hand and rebounded off the post. David Smith cracked in the rebound, and miraculously Sealey launched himself from near the left-hand post to deliver a right hook, and punch clear.

Coventry were sure the ball was well over the line, and from my seat I would have accepted it if the ref had given a goal.

John Sillett claimed the ball was at least a yard over, which was an amazing deduction from the half-way line dug-out.

SAVES

Sealey said: "I don't know how he could tell from where he was. I couldn't be sure myself. All I know is that I made the saves. The ref and linesmen were in the right positions and they thought the ball hadn't crossed the line."

The crowd's chants of "Cheats, cheats, cheats" finally died down in the 36th minute when Coven-

try's pressure paid off.

David Smith chipped in a diagonal cross from the right, after a corner had been half-cleared, and central defender Graham Rodger got above a scrum of players to direct his header into the net.

For the first 45 minutes, Coventry had brushed aside the Town's midfield, with a mixture of long ball and tight marking.

Manager Sillett had worried about his team playing well in away matches and doing poorly at home — they had failed to win their previous three matches at Highfield Road.

"I decided that to start with, at least, we would be like an away team," he said. "We worked to close down the opposition, to play it tight, and to deny them space. A lot of teams are having to do that — look at results and it's surprising how home teams are not as regular winners as they used to be."

The policy was all too effective for the Town. A midfield that might be capable of doing well going forward had too little to offer defensively.

Wilson again gave 100 per cent, chasing back and forth, tackling tenaciously and trying to get up in support of attacks.

But Steve Williams found himself by-passed, and I fear he and Ricky Hill together is a less than perfect balance.

Black is a potential match-winner if someone else will win and deliver the ball, but when he has to do the foraging as well his abilities are not being

used to maximum effect.

The best feature of the Town's second-half performance was an improvement in midfield creativity as Coventry tried to be more enterprising on their own account.

PACE

The game opened up, and Roy Wegerle threatened to cause major damage. His willingness to drop back and then run at defences had Coventry on tenterhooks several times. He showed pace and an ability to cross the ball well.

He and Hill combined to get round Brian Kilcline down the right and when the attack was half-stopped Williams hit a crisp low first-time drive which was saved.

Williams then opened up the defence on his own account, going down the left and crossing to beyond the far post. Black had switched to meet the ball, with the Coventry defence pulled apart, but his left-foot volley zipped into the side-netting, kidding the Luton fans, for one lovely moment, as they saw the rigging ripple and thought it was an equaliser.

Harford shot wide from another cross by Wegerle, and at least the Town were carving out chances.

Wegerle made another incisive run down the right, but chose to shoot at goal when Wilson was waiting for the cross, and Steve Ogrizovic saved.

The keeper was also in line with a shot hit by Black at the end of a mazy run, and as the game went

into injury time the Coventry fans were howling for the final whistle.

By then Williams had been substituted, for the first time since his transfer to Kenilworth Road, for David Oldfield to be let on as the third attacker.

In seven minutes he had little chance to make an impact, but the travelling fans made their feelings clear. The substitution raised their biggest cheer of the afternoon.

Town fans are being asked to be patient. I see what the manager is driving at. At Coventry he would have been delighted with the number of open-

ings the Town made, and with the way they chased an equaliser after a dodgy first half.

But with nearly a third of the season gone, we can't wait for ever for promise to be turned into achievement.

Mr Harford is wary about spending the club's money. But assets in the bank will be no consolation when we could have more assets on the field as we complete the first third of the season on Saturday.

And for me it was sad to see Williams trudging off. We had hoped for so much when he was signed, but he has not lived up to his reputation yet.

Match details

COVENTRY 1 LUTON TOWN 0
Half-time: 1-0 88/89

TOWN: Sealey; Rob Johnson, Foster, Marvin Johnson, Grimes; Williams (Oldfield 83 mins), Hill, Wilson, Black; Wegerle, Harford. Other sub: James.

COVENTRY: Ogrizovic; Borrows, Kilcline, Rodger, Downs; Clark, Speedie, Sedgley, Smith; Regis, Bannister. Subs: Houchen, Thompson.

THE GOAL: Graham Rodger header, 36th minute, from right wing cross by David Smith.

OTHER STRIKES: Coventry eight saved, eight wide, one hit a post; Town eight saved, three wide. Corners: 6-1 to Coventry.

ATTENDANCE: 12,631, Highfield Road's second lowest of the season so far.

REFEREE: Keith Burge, Tonypandy — infuriated Coventry by rejecting appeals that a header by Speedie and a shot by Smith had been saved after they had crossed the line.

ENTERTAINMENT: Probably good to Coventry or neutral eyes. The Town's second-half performance was spoiled by the failure to hit the target.