

PITCH SCORES THREE GOALS!

MEL MACHIN, apparently the puppet manager of Manchester City dancing to a chairman's tune, did his best on Tuesday night to devalue Luton Town's progress into the last eight of the Littlewoods Cup.

"The pitch is crap — print that," he asked. "Football is played on grass as far as I am concerned . . . we know why everybody gets beaten here."

He also admitted that in terms of possession the Town deserved their place in today's quarter-final draw.

City were a huge disappointment. As Second Division promotion hopefuls they came to Luton with just two defeats in their previous 19 league and cup games.

But they played a basic kick and run game, backed by an offside trap to try to squeeze space to the half-way line.

There was no question of trying to football their way through the Town, and while it was a poor spectacle the result was at least justice. If City's style is what they really want at Maine Road, good luck to them.

HELTER-SKELTER

We'll be glad of the six points a year if they make it.

The Town's problem was that it was difficult in a helter-skelter scuffle of a match to impose First Division quality on the proceedings.

It was not as pretty a team performance as we saw at Norwich — but the finishing was true First Division, with Roy Wegerle hitting two, for the second time in four days, and providing the other Town goal for David Oldfield.

Perhaps City decided that they couldn't afford to try quality football, even after they took an early lead with an excellent goal. And they got the rub of the green on offside — three times in four minutes in the second half the Town netted, with an offside flag denying them goals each time.

"It wasn't much of a spectacle, was it?" said Town boss Ray Harford. "We had to play cup-tie football to win it."

As at Norwich, a lot of the post-match Press talk was about Wegerle, who has revelled in his chance to play as a central attacker instead of on the wing, which was where Chelsea used him.

At £75,000 he looks a bargain. And, says his manager, he hasn't even tried some of the ball trickery he is capable of.

The delight for manager and fans alike was that a team that City clearly thought would be a soft touch against a biff-bang approach was prepared to give better than it got.

The midfielders had little chance to try to play it through from back to attack, but adjusted to the demands of the night.

Too much of the game was spent in a battle ten yards either side of the halfway line, with the result that neither side got too many shots on target for the first 50 minutes.

When attacking pattern was produced, it came from the Town. Without denying the offside decisions, Mr Harford made the point simply: "It could have been 6-1 or more. But I'll settle for what we have. It was a bad game

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Pictures by Josh Levy**

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for entertainment, but a good one in terms of the result.

"And I was delighted that once more we didn't seem to be worried when we conceded the first goal. I'd rather we didn't do it, but at least you can tell that the team feel they are capable of pulling it back.

"The crowd seemed to sense it as well, and the belief that you will score goals does wonders for players' confidence."

City's rumbustious opening could have been more embarrassing than it was. Ian Scott was clear in the second minute after a rare mistake by Steve Foster, but his close-range lob dropped onto the top of the netting.

Six minutes later David Preece, who emerged as one of the busiest workers in a side that realised it had to hustle for every ball, was robbed in midfield.

City moved the ball quickly to Nigel Gleghorn, on the left, and the makeshift defender who is a winger crossed perfectly for David White to smash in a stunning volley from beyond the far post.

Gleghorn's pleasure was short-lived. He was deputising for suspended left back Andy Hinchcliffe, and his defensive limitations were ruthlessly exposed.

He was left standing in the 16th minute as Mick Harford flicked a clearance by Foster towards the right wing.

Wegerle outpaced everyone, got into the inside right position and shot powerfully for the far corner. Andy Dibble's save became a parry that was a perfect lay-off to Oldfield, who accepted the gift equaliser.

HAMMERED IN

Five minutes later Richard Harvey's ball over the top set Wegerle free for another run and this time the low drive was hammered into the far corner, needing no help from anyone.

City's offside game and some fussy refereeing by Dennis Hedges of Oxford prevented the game from flowing, but in the second half the Town were unstoppable.

Three times in four minutes the ball was in the net behind Dibble, in front of a delighted Oak Road end.

Preece twice thought he had got his first goal of the season, and Wegerle was the other hotshot, but each time City were saved by the offside flag.

City's raids became more and more sporadic, although there was a minor scare when Brian Gayle helped on Neil McNab's free kick and Trevor Morley's bicycle kick had to be tipped over the bar by Les Sealey.

It turned out to be the only serious save he had to make, and after Oldfield and Kingsley Black had missed chances to make it safe Wegerle settled matters with the Town's third goal in the 86th minute.

His partnership with Oldfield, with Harford roaming in a more free role, looks as though it could be lethal, was Oldfield's header from Harvey's free kick was the touch which confused the City defence to give Wegerle his opening.

Match details

**LUTON TOWN 3
MANCHESTER CITY 1
(HALF-TIME: 2-1)**

TOWN: Sealey; Rob Johnson, Foster, Marvin Johnson, Harvey; Wilson, Preece, Black; Harford (Hill, 73 mins), Oldfield, Wegerle. Other sub: Dreyer.

CITY: Dibble; Seagraves, Gayle, Redmond, Gleghorn; Scott (Beckford, 74 mins), McNab, White; Morley, Moulden, Biggins. Other sub: Taggart.

THE GOALS: David White volley for City, 8th minute; David Oldfield for the Town, 16th minute, after Dibble parried Roy Wegerle's shot; Wegerle, 21st minute, run and sharp shot from Richard Harvey's long ball; Wegerle, 86th minute, from Oldfield's headed pass.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved, three wide and three netted and disallowed for offside; City two saved and two wide. Corners: 2-1 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 10,778, including 2,600 visiting fans who behaved well, even if they did go bananas in the attempt to lift a kick and run team.

REFEREE: Dennis Hedges, Oxford. Too keen to be involved and make his presence noticeable.

ENTERTAINMENT: Thud and blunder cup-tie, very scrappy, but with the result right. City manager Machin blamed the pitch, surprise, surprise.