

GEORDIES OFF

Match details

**LUTON TOWN 0
NEWCASTLE UTD 0**

88/89

TOWN: Sealey; Rob Johnson, Foster, Marvin Johnson, Harvey; Wilson, Hill, Preece; Wegerle, Oldfield (Allinson, 80 mins), Black. Other sub: James.

NEWCASTLE: Beasant; Cornwall, Anderson, Thorn, Tinnion; McCreery, Hendrie, O'Brien, Jackson, Mirandinha (Gourlay, 76 mins), Payne. Other sub: Scott.

GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town five saved and nine wide; Newcastle two saved and eight wide. Corners: 9-5 to the Town.

REFEREE: Roger Milford, Bristol — might have missed a crafty handball in the Newcastle penalty area in the last few minutes, but the Town missed a lot more in the same area.

ATTENDANCE: 8,338, an increase of 700 on Newcastle's previous visit.

ENTERTAINMENT: Ruined by the Town's inability to finish a lot of promising build-up work on a day when Mick Harford was much missed. But Newcastle never looked like scoring.

ON A DAY WHEN some of us were dreaming of a hatful of goals against the troubled bottom club in the First Division, Luton Town's inexperienced attack had a nightmare afternoon.

Newcastle went home with a point they considered to be rich reward, despite extending their record to not a single goal scored in six consecutive matches.

The large Press corps that follows the Magpies flew down to the bookies before the game to place bets on the size of Newcastle's defeat. They covered everything from 1-0 to 6-0, and later cried in their beer because while they were right to back the Town to keep a clean sheet they never expected it of their own men.

They went home asking how David Oldfield could have failed to live up to his reputation, thanking the fates that had kept Mick Harford out of the game against one of his former clubs, and regretting that they would probably not be coming back to Kenilworth Road next season.

Perhaps the Town simply had too much of the game against a team that is browbeaten and befuddled by the sacking of a manager they liked and by a boardroom battle for power.

Colin Suggett, the former reserve team coach who was reported to be about ninth choice when he became manager, impressed in the Pressroom with his courtesy and dignity. He didn't know, apparently, that a month after being confirmed in the job his directors were quietly lining up Jim Smith of QPR, who replaced him two days later.

Mr Suggett was delighted that his team of no-hopers, robbed by injury of four regulars, had "done a very good job . . . I thought we got what we deserved." He spoke of Newcastle battling, but making problems for themselves.

Brazilian star Mirandinha, worrying about reports that he is about to be transfer-listed, was almost anonymous and was pulled off the last 15 minutes. "He's not playing well. In fact we are not playing well," admitted Mr Suggett.

He was full of praise for his back four, but disappointed in a shot-shy attack. Lee Payne came home to the club that turned him down after a few reserve games, and did little to suggest it had been a dreadful mistake. But he could complain that service to colleagues appears to have been banned at St James's Park.

The shock for home supporters was that faced with such mediocrity the Town managed to match it in one vital area.

Chances were made to lift everyone's spirits — and then wasted to have us all hair-tearing in frustration.

The Town enjoyed a lot of possession, mastery of mid-field, and an edge in speed and thought.

ARE LET THE HOOK

But it all came to nothing, despite Newcastle's best efforts to lend a helping hand.

A back pass by John Anderson, chasing towards his own goal because Roy Wegerle was on his heels, beat Dave Beasant and went into the side netting.

A 25-yard drive by Kingsley Black saw Beasant stretch his giant frame to tip the ball over the bar. Another mistake by Anderson let Wegerle in from a long pass by Rob Johnson. Wegerle rounded Beasant, but in the time it took to set up the shot Andy Thorn had raced back to cover, and cleared off the line.

EASY FOR DEFENCE

Ricky Hill, recalled to release Black into attack in the absence of Harford, introduced a little thought when the Town threatened to try a little too hard, but against a team of battlers there was not enough coolness in the penalty area.

The defence had an easy afternoon, mainly because Danny Wilson and David Preece stopped Newcastle's powder-puff attacking threat before it could develop.

Les Sealey had only two saves to make: once to rush out as a sweeper and clear before Mirandinha could reach a through-ball, and once early in the second half when John Hendrie's clever lob needed a tip-over save.

At the other end Beasant had to be alert throughout, and was let off the hook by the Town's failure to match approach work of high standard with the required level of finishing. Too much was well off-target.

Oldfield, still learning his trade, had one of those days when nothing would go right, with his worst miss one in the second half when Preece's low cross left him clear in front of goal. He side-footed over the bar, and later missed by a fraction when he tried to connect with a cross by Wilson.

Oldfield, however, is still in his first season as a First Division player, and there was genuine applause when he was pulled off for the last ten minutes. Every star of today can remember those yesterdays when they struggled.

My only worry — and manager Ray Harford said that the thought also crossed his mind — was that this was one of those game when the Town were so much on top but missing the boat, that the visitors might just have nicked a goal and all three points.

He was right to be worried — my mind went back to a game when the Magpies did exactly that at Kenilworth Road some years ago. Their scorer was Mick Harford.

At least this time the Magpies had no one capable of doing that. Sadly, nor had the Town.