

Clough family strike silver at long last

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Nottingham Forest 3
Luton Town..... 1

Wembley belonged to Nottingham Forest and specifically to the Clough family yesterday. Nigel was credited with the opening and closing goals in an increasingly convincing victory in the Littlewoods Cup final to give his controversial father, Brian, his first domestic trophy as a manager for a decade.

The older Clough reacted with the dignity and graciousness characteristic of his side. He sat calmly with his arms folded as Forest congratulated themselves on their triumph and then stood up to shake the hands of each Luton Town player as they climbed the steps to collect their loser's medals.

He then trotted away towards the end filled with the Forest supporters and paused momentarily to acclaim one of the biggest roars of the afternoon before walking into the silence of an uninhabited dressing-room. He left his squad to relish their lap of honour around the stadium.

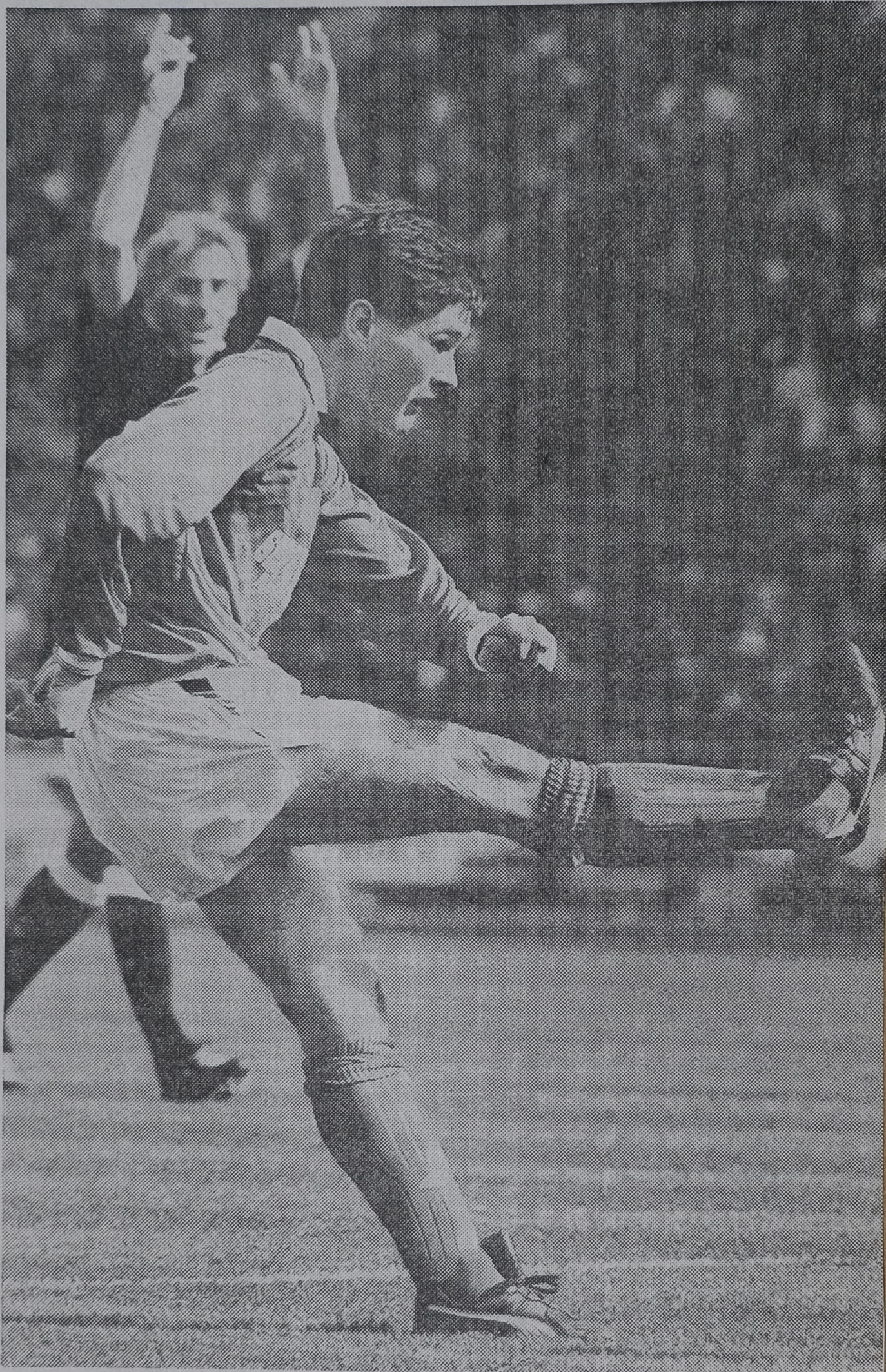
Forest, whose style is as admirable as their conduct, deserved the cup, but Luton Town played their part, especially in the first half of a final full of appealing adventure. It turned on a fateful decision by their goalkeeper, who recklessly conceded a penalty in the 55th minute.

Until then Harford had wandered around like a colossus, spreading fear through Forest's back four and into the mind of the unnerved Wilson in particular. Luton's centre forward, matchless in the air, was in charge of everything above ground and his colleagues regularly recognized his predictable superiority.

They became almost obsessed with it, sending over crosses at every opportunity. Forest were uneasy and, with the speedy Wegerle on the prowl, Luton threatened to take the lead before they did in the 36th minute. The source, a centre from Wilson, was as inevitable as the scorer, Harford.

Had Hill not run out of room, and had Sutton not tipped over a crisp drive from Grimes, Luton's hold on the cup would have been even firmer by the interval. Yet Forest had already pulled themselves out of their initial inhibition and were beginning to reveal their undoubted quality.

It came to full fruition during a second half in which their movement, touch and variation were too strong for their opponents to control. But, after Laws had cleared a half-hit shot from Harford off the line, the opening crack in Luton's resistance was largely self-inflicted.



A chip of the old block: Clough following in his father's footsteps at Wembley yesterday

Webb's astute chip prompted Sealey to leave his goalmouth and, even though Foster might have been able to block the direct route, to halt Hodge's delayed run into the area by bringing him down. Nigel Clough, with his eighteenth goal of the season, nervelessly converted the penalty.

Forest became an irresistible force on the right flank, where Carr might have inflicted more severe damage had he been available. Gaynor, though ponderous by comparison, proved to be an adequate substitute. Released by Nigel Clough, he created the second goal in the 67th minute for Webb.

In softly cushioning the cross, Webb's control was as neat and as accomplished as his finish. Ten minutes later, Gaynor was again the provider, rolling an invitation into the path of Nigel Clough, who crowned his afternoon by

squeezing in the third off the foot of a post.

Not only was he voted the man of the match, he also became the competition's leading goalscorer. His father typically dismissed the contribution of his side before the interval. "We didn't play in the first half," he said, "but it was a lovely game and today football was the winner."

Luton were the losers for the first time in the Littlewoods Cup since 1985 and were the first underdogs to be beaten at Wembley since 1986. They are not the ideal statistics to take with them into the last few weeks of a season which could yet end with them being relegated from the first division.

NOTTINGHAM FOREST: S Sutton; B Laws, S Pearce, D Walker, T Wilson, S Hodge, T Gaynor, N Webb, N Clough, L Chapman, G Parker.

LUTON TOWN: L Sealey; T Breacker, A Grimes (sub: D McDonough), D Preece, S Foster, D Beaumont, D Wilson, R Wegerle, M Harford, R Hill, K Black.

Referee: R Millford.

Kisses from Clough

Neil Webb, scorer of Nottingham Forest's second goal, said: "We showed a lot of character after being 1-0 down and we played very well in the second half. We are a maturing side. I can't see any reason why we can't go on to better things" (Louise Taylor writes).

Brian Laws summed up Forest's performance thus: "We just let the ball do all the work for us and they were chasing blank spaces."

Ray Harford, the Luton manager, said: "Overall we probably had the better chances. Brian Clough has kissed me four times today."