

BRIGHT PROMISE WINS NO PRIZES

FLATTERING TO deceive in yet another awayday failing, Luton Town had only themselves to blame for defeat at Maine Road.

There were spells, particularly in the last 20 minutes of the first half, when they looked much the better side. But the carefree approach that created attacking chances, as at Mansfield in the Littlewoods Cup first leg, cost them dear in defence.

Perhaps there is not a lot wrong that the return of Mick Harford can't put right. But when you have the opposition on the ropes, as the Town had at one stage of Saturday's game, building up an advantage on points is not a lot of good when the other guy produces the knock-out.

And City had the punch that the Town lacked, with right winger David White enjoying a dream while the Town's left flank had a nightmare.

Manager Ray Harford deflected criticism of young left back Richard Harvey, who kept his place in the back four that finished the game against Wimbledon after Darron McDonough was stretched off.

KINGSLEY BLACK SPARKLES

The boss pointed out that there should have been better defensive work done in front of Harvey. But with David Preece out of sorts and Mick Kennedy taking a long time to make an impression, we were left to draw consolation from a sparkling show by Kingsley Black.

He danced around just behind the front two with a series of mesmerising runs that had City well stretched. His goal, cleverly taken, was a bonus equaliser and should have been the platform for a better result.

It seemed to have compensated for yet another penalty miss, with Roy Wegerle the Town's second culprit of the season. But as we enjoyed seeing the Town show a more cavalier approach to football, the reshaped defence lost its professionalism to gift City a half-time lead.

And it hardly cheered us up to see City's back four being made to look equally uncomfortable at times: the difference was that City had the forwards to cash in, while the Town did not.

Lars Elstrup is still struggling to make an impact in the First Division, missed one golden chance, and was substituted again.

Wegerle looked a million dollars in the area leading up to the final strike, but was not allowed to get in where he might have done more damage. And for all their possession and threatening work in some very good midfield build-up moves, the Town created fewer clear chances than City.

In the first 15 minutes I feared the worst, because the Blues were still on a high after their biggest-ever Manchester Derby win a week earlier. They played with pace and precision, and looked capable of hit-

ting five goals again.

Desperate defending, with Alec Chamberlain, Harvey and Tim Breacker prominent, kept the scoresheet blank for 11 minutes until David Oldfield hit his old pals with a stunning opener. It was a brilliant goal, starting with right back Gary Fleming deep in his own half. He flicked the ball down the line to Trevor Morley, whose instant lay-off sent David White racing down the wing.

It was a sight we were to see all too often. He got to the by-line quickly, crossed accurately, and Oldfield dived full length to head in.

PENDULUM SWINGS BACK

City should have made more of White's domination of the Town's left, but as the Town were put under the cosh Chamberlain saved from Morley, Breacker conceded a corner to prevent Paul Lake meeting a cross and then Lake was inches short of making contact when another hard low centre fizzed through the penalty area.

But the Town gradually got sorted out, and with Wilson enjoying his return to Maine Road — he was on loan there from Bury for just four days before Malcolm Allison was sacked — the pendulum swung.

A poor header by Brian Gayle opened the way for Elstrup, who should have scored his first league goal. But the experienced Paul Cooper, deputising for injured Andy Dibble, closed him down early and made half a save, and Steve Redmond raced back to complete it with a clearance off the goal-line.

Black had a 25-yarder saved and the Town were well on top when Wilson went for goal from a pass by Wegerle. Brightwell brought him down, and Wegerle, a penalty scorer a week earlier, took the responsibility willingly. But Cooper teased him into

shooting to the keeper's right instead of left, and the save was made with no hint of the referee deciding Cooper had moved early.

I feared that would be the equivalent of City scoring, but it had the right effect on the Town. They kept their game going and City were on the rack for a spell. The 43rd-minute equaliser was no less than the Town deserved. Elstrup headed down Harvey's ball into the box, and Black kept cool to control it and fire the shot carefully beyond Cooper's left hand, into the far corner from the inside left position.

Suddenly visions appeared of the first Town away win in ten months. Perhaps the defence was enjoying similar dreams, but they were quickly shattered. Within two minutes City played their trump card White again, and Ian Bishop headed in from beyond the far post to make it 2-1 at half-time.

CAUGHT STRETCHED

The first 14 minutes of the second half gave little evidence that either side could regain complete control, but the Town enjoyed more of the attacking, with Kennedy, Wegerle and Wilson all contributing to promising moves that delivered nothing very substantial.

There was a willingness to have a go at City, but it came to nothing in the 59th minute when the Town were caught stretched and square. White galloped away yet again, and this time Ian Brightwell, son of a famous sprinter, accepted the gift, again at the far post.

The Town were never less than City's equals after that. The problem was that the home side could play a containing game, with a two-goal lead under their belt, and for all their possession the Town did not look capable of providing the penalty area bite that was needed.

Match details

MANCHESTER CITY 3 LUTON TOWN 1 (Half-time: 2-1)

TOWN: Chamberlain; Breacker, Beaumont, Dreyer, Harvey; Black, Wilson, Kennedy (Johnson, 81 mins), Preece; Elstrup (Cooke, 68 mins), Wegerle.

CITY: Cooper; Fleming, Redmond, Gayle, Hinchcliffe; White, Brightwell, Lake (McNab, 60 mins), Bishop; Morley, Oldfield.

THE GOALS: David Oldfield for City, flying header, 11th minute; Kingsley Black, well-placed shot, 43 minutes; Ian Bishop header for City, seconds before the half-time whistle; Ian Brightwell, 59th minute, the third City goal to come from runs and crosses from the right wing by David White.

OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved, including a penalty by Roy Wegerle, and five wide; City seven saved and six wide. Corners: 3-3.

REFEREE: Roger Milford, Bristol. Did well to keep on top when isolated minor incidents threatened to become worse.

YELLOW CARD: John Dreyer's first of the season for a foul on Trevor Morley in the 79th minute, after earlier warnings.

ATTENDANCE: 23,863, the biggest for any Town match so far this season, and the day's second highest in the First Division, bettered only by the Chelsea v Arsenal match at Stamford Bridge.

ENTERTAINMENT: Wretched for Town supporters. They saw some spells of good football by their team, but there was little bite in the box, and the left flank had a nightmare afternoon.