

SportsNews

CHASE FOR STRIKING

A MIXTURE OF bewilderment and shock hit Luton Town and their fans as they suffered their worst defeat since Jim Ryan became manager.

"Were we really as bad as 6-1 sounds?" was the big question.

The harsh answer is that figures don't lie, and the Town were second best on the two most important basics of football: scoring goals and preventing them.

MISTAKES AT BOTH ENDS

And I agreed with Mr. Ryan that if blame has to be apportioned it attaches to the whole team, not just one part of it. Crucial failings in both penalty areas produced a result which did not reflect the balance of the game.

The ref thought it should have been about 7-5 to QPR, and he was about right. The Town created more scoring openings than Rangers — but the

Brian Swain reports
Pictures: Josh Levy

home team converted a good proportion of them. On a warm afternoon the Rangers hit firm almost throughout the team, with Roy Wegerle an inspiration against his old mates.

The Town had a day when too many men were a notch below their best, at both ends of the park, and they started chasing the game Rangers made capital of the inevitable gaps at the back.

But I hope Saturday's humiliation does not lead to the scrapping of the brave belief in trying to take every match to the opposition. Had the Town worked to avoid a pasting they could have come with perhaps a 3-1 defeat at worst. But the

informed intention of Mr. Ryan, backed by his players is to try to win games rather than try not to lose them.

If fans agree with that — and we did even when David Platt preached the same and took us to the brink of relegation at Maine Road in 1983 — they will have to accept the occasional on-again off-again disaster.

EASY FOR THE KEEPER!

The balance and the defensive organisation went wrong at Loftus Road. But Iain Dowie, for one, could have had a hot-trick with a touch more quality and luck.

Tim Breacker also found time and space to go up for shots at goal and it is an oddity that despite letting in six goals Alex Chamberlain was otherwise never in any real difficulty, and had an easier afternoon than his opposite number.

Rangers had a day when almost everything they touched in attack turned to gold. The Town had a more spasmodic attack, a variable midfield and a lack of defensive bite when they were stretched on the flanks.

Julian James is going through a trying spell in a left back role he does not particularly relish and while Wegerle's contribution was immense it is a sad fact that for both his goals he robbed a Town player near the danger area before setting off for the run and far-corner shot.

The Town looked good going forward and in the first half they were unlucky to be trailing in Wegerle's early strike. That came about when he snuffed the ball off David Preece with a challenge that looked a foul from the Pressbox. Wegerle got away with it, tricked his way past John Dreyer and buried the shot.

WEGERLE HITS THE HEIGHTS

Ceri Hughes continued his delightful progress and he and Preece threatened to control the important midfield area.

But in the second half, when the Town's better-sketcher chase for goals got a little overheated the calmness of Ray Wilkins was the decisive factor. Wegerle is playing a more involved game for Rangers than he did at Kenilworth Road, and his greatest danger came when he drifted out to the flanks. As well as his two goals he made telling contributions to two others.

HEADS UP: Iain Dowie leaps to try to meet a cross from Lars Elstrup but goalkeeper Tony Roberts gets there first. The keeper was on edge for most of the first half, and relieved to be in the way of a couple of pildrivers by Dowie.



BRIGHT SPOT: Ceri Hughes, who scored the first league goal of his career, tries for another.

Town match verdict ★ ★

GOALS IS A DISASTER

Three minutes after the break he sent David Bardsley clear down the right wing and an excellent goal was met by a far post header from Andy Sinton to put QPR two up.

It was the start of a disastrous 15-minute period for the Town. In the 55th minute Wilkins was unmarked in front of goal to head a simple goal from a left wing cross by Sinton.

A GOAL TO REMEMBER

Two minutes later came the first league goal for Hughes, one he has threatened ever since he got into the side. Preece floated in a free kick, Dreyer headed the ball down and Hughes hit a scorching drive into the bottom corner of the net from about 15 yards.

At 3-1 I still fancied the Town to get something out of a game that was full of entertaining and flowing football. But as they pressed Breacker was relieved of the ball in the area by Wegerle 3 minutes, and two minutes later Wegerle crossed from the left and Mark Falco cracked in a classy volley to make it 5-1.

Paul Parker got the sixth five minutes from time after he and Sinton exchanged passes in a sweet move down the middle of the pitch.

The Town suffered because they had no-one capable of similar crispness, with Dowie out of luck with a couple of shots and a diving header and Lars Elstrup rarely involved in the sharp end.

Both subs were sent on when it was 5-1 with nearly 20 minutes to go, but it made little difference. Karl Nogan's first touch was to meet a cross by Jason Rees and send his header well over the bar.

It was all too typical of the way the Town did so much that was right in the build-up, then just about everything wrong in the last touch.

Don Howe said later that it had been one of those days when everything went right for his team and he had expected it to happen eventually, even if six goals was overdoing it a little.

I must say the same will be true of the Town as they gain the valuable experience of learning how to come back from a result was that was a lot worse than the promise they showed in terms of attacking football. We all like to be promised nice things but the real delight is still the actual delivery of the goods.

The season so far

THE TOWN's results, scorers, attendances and league table position:

25 C. Palace (h) 1-1 (Dowie)	9,583
24 Arsenal (a) 1-2 (Elstrup)	32,723
1 Southampton (a) 2-1 (Elstrup 2)	14,878
4 Man United (h) 0-1	12,576
6 Leeds Utd (h) 1-0 (Black)	10,185
15 QPR (h) 1-6 (Hughes)	10,196

LEAGUE APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets:
Chamberlain 5, Breacker 6, Beaumont 5, Dreyer 6, James 6, Hughes 6, Preece 6, Elstrup 6, Dowie 6, Black 5, McDonough 3 (1), Rees 3(3), Harvey 1(2), Nogan 3, Johnson 2.

The First Division

	HOME	AWAY	Pts
Liverpool	5	10	9
Arsenal	5	2	0
Tottenham	5	2	0
C. Palace	5	2	0
Man City	5	3	0
Man United	6	2	0
QPR	5	2	0
Coventry	5	1	2
Leeds	5	1	1
Sheff Wed	5	1	1
Sheff Utd	5	1	1
Derby Co	5	2	1



BACKING UP: Julian James goes past Ray Wilkins to start a Town attack.

Good omen for Coventry's visit?

The managers' viewpoints

RANGERS COACH Don Howe admitted that his team's best win since he became boss a year ago was partly due to the way the Town approached the game.

"Luton to play good football and that helps us because we try to do the same," he said. "Luton made a lot of chances but we took ours at last — we had not scored the goals we should have done in other games this season but I thought that one day they would start to go into the net instead of just miss and that was what happened today."

I must say the same will be true of the Town as they gain the valuable experience of learning how to come back from a result was that was a lot worse than the promise they showed in terms of attacking football. We all like to be promised nice things but the real delight is still the actual delivery of the goods.

SMALL CONSOLATION

Jim Ryan replied: "I don't want to be known as a team that plays nice football and loses!" His worst defeat before Saturday was 4-1 at Old Trafford last March.

The Town recovered by beating Coventry City in the following match, at home, so the co-incidence that brings Coventry back to Kenilworth Road on Saturday might be a nice omen.

The manager and skipper John Dreyer confirmed that there was a straight-talking team meeting in the dressing room on Monday to sort out what went wrong at Loftus Road.

Mr. Ryan was a depressed man on Saturday night, but determined to turn potential disaster into something positive.

"Perhaps one problem was that all afternoon it

looked as though we could score goals. Perhaps we fooled ourselves.

"But we kept getting good chances from good play and we ended up almost like the home team, with Rangers doing the counter-attacking and catching us on the break. And they are good at that, with quick players who can break very fast."

The boss refused to put all the blame for six goals on his defenders. "Defensive play begins with the front players — the whole team defends. But we felt we could score and get forward and in the end we were going better-sketcher for their goal and allowing them to break us on."

LACK OF PATIENCE

"We have inexperienced players and perhaps we were a bit naive. A lack of patience showed. At half-time everyone thought there were goals to be got and we went out for the second half chasing them rather than consolidating and waiting patiently for the chances."

Players were a little hot at the first instinct, in the dressing room at Loftus Road. Said the boss: "Players have their pride and so have coaches. We

don't want to lose and it's inevitable that there will be a few words about it.

"But we have to learn from losing as well as from winning: in many ways there were good things we can take. The fact that we looked like scoring, especially in an away game."

"A lot of our players are still going through the learning process and we must take in the lessons from that game. We must not react the wrong way to the result — we must take heart from the good things and learn from the bad ones."

MIDAS CLUB

WEEK 20

COMMENCING MONDAY 10th SEPTEMBER

MR A. FINCH, LAMBS CLOSE, DUNSTABLE, BEDFORDSHIRE

ES consolation prizes £5110, £2110, £1110, £2110, £2110

TUESDAY 11th SEPTEMBER

N. STEPHENSON, BROAD MEAD, LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

ES consolation prizes £1892, £1892, £1892, £1892, £1892

WEDNESDAY 12th SEPTEMBER

MRS J. SMITH, CHESFORD ROAD, LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

ES consolation prizes £1265, £1265, £1265, £1265, £1265

THURSDAY 13th SEPTEMBER

M. DONALDSON, HAYWOOD DRIVE, LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

ES consolation prizes £6009, £6009, £6009, £6009, £6009

FRIDAY 14th SEPTEMBER

MRS T. O'DELL, PUTTERIDGE ROAD, LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE

ES consolation prizes £1202, £1202, £1202, £1202, £1202

CROSS PURPOSES: Iain Dowie tries to open up the Rangers defence.

Today's Club News

Match ticket line information & bookings

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FANS phone-in

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