

Sports News

NEARLY PERFECT BUT FOR A LACK OF A FINAL FLOURISH



● **OUCH:** Lars Elstrup covers up as Brian Kilcline whacks a clearance at him. The Danish international was always a problem for the centre-half when he moved into the centre of attack, but had no luck with his finishing.

The season so far

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

August		
25 G. Palace (h) 1-1 (Dowie)	9,583	
28 Arsenal (a) 1-2 (Elstrup)	32,723	
September		
1 Southampton (a) 2-1 (Elstrup 2)	14,878	8
4 Man United (h) 0-1	12,576	8
8 Leeds Utd (h) 1-4 (Black)	10,185	8
15 QPR (a) 1-6 (Hughes)	10,196	11
22 Coventry (h) 0-2 (Dowie)	8,336	7

LEAGUE APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Chamberlain 7, Breacker 7, Beaumont 7, Dreyer 7, Hughes 7, Preece 7, Elstrup 7, Dowie 7, James 6(1), Black 6, Rees 4(2), McDonough 3(1), Harvey 2(2), Negan (3), Johnson (2).

LEAGUE GOALS: Elstrup 3, Dowie 2, Black and Hughes 1.

MIDAS CLUB

£100 WINNERS
WEEK 31
COMMENCING MONDAY
17th SEPTEMBER

MR GREENLAND, MOSSBANK
AVENUE, LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE
£5 consolation prizes £3282, £3282, £3282,
£3282, £3282, £3282, £3282

TUESDAY 18th SEPTEMBER
£5333
P. BOZIER, NORTHVIEW ROAD,
LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE
£5 consolation prizes £3533, £3533, £3533,
£3533, £3533, £3533, £3533

WEDNESDAY 19th SEPTEMBER
£4839
MRS RODGERS, MOORLAND
GARDENS, LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE
£5 consolation prizes £4839, £4839, £4839,
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DUNSTABLE, BEDFORDSHIRE
£5 consolation prizes £5123, £5123, £5123,
£5123, £5123, £5123, £5123

FRIDAY 21st SEPTEMBER
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MRS BOUTWOOD, GOSWELLEN
ROAD, HARTINGTON, BEDFORDSHIRE
£5 consolation prizes £2257, £2257, £2257,
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Prizes: 1. Gift, 2. Luggage, 3. Trip, 4. Trip, 5. Trip, 6. Trip, 7. Trip, 8. Trip, 9. Trip, 10. Trip

ALTHOUGH THEY should have won more decisively, the Town regained their pride as well as their style as they buried unhappy Loftus Road memories with their third win of the season.

Coventry City played their part in an entertaining contest, playing with two wingers and being forced to be positive by the early goal against them.

PRIDE REGAINED

The mystery was how so much attacking play by both sides could produce so little goalmouth excitement, and so few saves by the keepers.

The pleasure for Town fans was that the team thoroughly rehabilitated itself and regained profes-

Brian Swain reports

sional pride with a performance that illustrates the continued progress Jim Ryan is leading.

He stands firm behind a policy of always trying to score more than the other side. He risks occasional disaster, as happened at Loftus Road, and the only worry for supporters is that this brave new world of attacking football needs to hit more than a goal a match to make it consistently successful.

While the defence was much better than at Loftus Road you can always see the possibility of the other side snatching something and a one-goal cushion is rarely deep enough to leave us sitting comfortably to appreciate the neat passing game that can football is way through the opposition.

'Playing football in the right way'

The managers' viewpoints

COVENTRY manager John Sillett was disappointed to lose at Kenilworth Road, but added: "Fair play to Luton — they play the game as it should be played."

He was contrasting the entertainment served up by two teams trying to be positive with the game he had seen a week earlier when Ray Harford's Wimbledon had battled to a 0-0 draw at Highfield Road.

PLEASURE

On that occasion, among accusations that Wimbledon were a negative long-ball team relying on an offside trap, he had produced a football at his press conference and explained to reporters that this was an item that was supposed to be played with, not battered into submission.

At Luton, he said, he could take a

little pleasure from the fact that he had seen a good game, but his team had to do something to step up their scoring rate.

Ironically their average is the same as the Town's, one per match. Jim Ryan was not too surprised by the result a week after a 6-1 thrashing.

His only criticism was that once more the Town had failed to score as many goals as they had deserved.

Motivation had been off-putted by players who were determined to wipe out memories of the humiliation at QPR.

Said the boss: "We knew that we were not as bad as a 6-1 defeat would have the players felt that result was unjust, and they wanted to make up for it."

"Against Coventry we were better than the 1-0 win suggests. That is the only downside from the game — the fact that we are an attacking team, and should score more freely, but we certainly bounced back from a poor performance at QPR."

"The defensive play was better, and I was pleased by the quality of some of our passing. It's the sort of football I want to see us play."

The manager was not prepared to single out individuals, but was delighted to hear so many praise the contributions of inexperienced men like Jason Rees and Ceri Hughes.

"It was a good team performance and that was the real strength of our game," said the boss.

He did not disclose if he would have changed midfield if Darron McDermott had not been ruled out by a hamstring injury.

One change had been made in defence, with Richard James recalled at the expense of Julian James.

PLATFORM

"Julian's form had dropped a little bit and the time was right to give him a rest."

"He is still only 20, and the lesson is there for both players: no-one's a star in the team is certain. If you can accept it in the correct way — and Julian and Richard both can — it gives you a platform to bounce back into the side."



● THE DECIDER: Steve Ogrizovic flies through the air as Iain Dowie's header hits the net.

Town match verdict ★ ★ ★

Pictures: Josh Levy

Fortunately Coventry were poor when it came to doing damage in the penalty area — their best scoring attempt was a 25-yard drive in the first half by defender Brian Kilcline which Alec Chamberlain did well to save at full stretch.

Kilcline's major work had to be in trying to subdue Iain Dowie, a mix of muscle and determination that defenders hate.

His second goal of the season was just reward for his 90 minutes of effort, all the more meritorious because he is still playing each game with a touch of anaesthetic to deaden the pain of a broken bone.

Jim Ryan rightly stressed the importance every man had played in the performance, but my choice as man of the match fell on Ceri Hughes again.

They say every young player has to be taken out of a team after the first half a dozen games or so. I hope Hughes is the exception who proves the rule, because his development has pulled off a lovely game for a manager who sold off two experienced midfielders in the summer.

We might pay for that on heavy grounds in mid-water, but in the meantime how pleasing it is to see Hughes and Jason Rees grab their opportunities.

Dowie Preece is also enjoying a new lease of life in a side that plays his sort of football, and with the Town having the greater passing skill in midfield Coventry were lucky to be left off with only one goal against them.

DEFT LITTLE HEADER

It came from the Town's first attack. Kevin Dinkell had wasted a first-minute chance when he should have done better than fire over the bar after a poor header by David Beaumont put him in with a booting chance.

The Town replied when Richard Harvey, replacing Julian James, chipped a diagonal pass towards Dowie. Kilcline got there first but headed the ball at the Town striker, who immediately jetted forward and fired in a low drive at the far corner.

Steve Ogrizovic did well to turn the shot round the post, but was beaten from the corner. Preece played a short to Kingsley Black and he knocked in a shot from the inside right position. It might have hit the net unaided, but Dowie made sure with a deft flicked header to complete the keeper's confusion.

Match details

LUTON TOWN 1 COVENTRY 0
(Half-time: 1-0)

TOWN: Chamberlain; Breacker, Beaumont, Dreyer, Harvey, Rees, Hughes, Preece; Black, Dowie, Elstrup (James 86 mins). Other subs: Negan.

COVENTRY: Ogrizovic; Borrowes, Kilcline, Peake, Edwards (Titterton 55 mins); Gallagher (Livingstone 75 mins), Gynn, McDonald, Smith; Speedie, Drinkell.

THE GOAL: Iain Dowie, deft flicked header from corner in the second minute.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and ten wide; Coventry five saved and eight wide. Corner 5-5.

REFeree: Jim Rushton, Stoke. It was hard to agree with all his decisions, and he was probably a little too keen on the yellow cards. He might not have been too happy at seeing his name spelled wrongly both times.

BOOKED: David Beaumont, Lars Elstrup and Kevin McDonald for fouls and Tim Breacker for dissent. Midweek visit last season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Pretty good, with both teams trying to play football. Home fans would have enjoyed it more if the promise of further goals had been delivered by some delightful passing soccer. One-goal leads keep you on tenterhooks for fear that one mistake at the back can cause an injustice.

Coventry's 4-4-2 formation was designed to get Kevin Gallagher and David Smith into wide attacking positions, but Harvey and Tim Breacker were helped to snuff out most of their danger by the way Hughes, Preece and Rees fought for the ball in midfield. But Coventry had their chances, and might have snatched a goal or two but for wayward finishing by David Speedie, Gallagher, Drinkell and Micky Gynn.

I almost felt sorry for Speedie, who was so often the only visiting striker who showed any real appetite to battle it out.

Beaumont had a problem or two with him, and collected a booking for the second of two crumpling tackles that upset a referee who was not always a flavour of the month with either side.

Lars Elstrup still cannot find the scoring touch we are willing him to rediscover. He might have scored twice in the first half, but was tackled out of one chance by Paul Edwards after a clever build-up instigated by Harvey and Rees, and wasted another by shooting wide from a cross by Breacker.

The Town took a stronger grip on the game in the second half, but the old problem of not finishing what they start so well reared up again.

And while a one-goal lead keeps the fans on edge, it was always the Town who looked more likely to hit the target.

SWEET PASSES

Preece and Dowie played a sweet one-two to put Preece in, but Ogrizovic saved at his feet, and another swift attack down the right ended with Dowie not quite able to climb high enough to direct his header accurately when Breacker supplied yet another quality run and cross.

The fullback's ability to support attacks was an important contribution to an all-round Town display that would have been perfect if two or three more goals had been added. But as Jim Ryan said, let's be grateful for three points.

They were gathered and well deserved by football based on skill and teamwork, and that made them all the more welcome.



● INTERNATIONAL ASSAULT: Kingsley Black and Lars Elstrup get together to set a Town attack in motion.

Best for a year

The First Division

	HOME	AWAY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	6	3	0	8	1	3	0	8	48
Arsenal	6	2	1	6	2	1	0	6	14
Man United	7	3	0	8	3	1	2	2	13
Tottenham	6	2	1	0	7	2	1	0	12
C. Palace	6	2	1	0	5	3	1	2	12
Man City	6	3	0	0	5	2	0	1	11
Leeds	6	1	1	3	2	0	1	5	10
Luton Town	7	2	1	3	2	0	2	4	10
A. Villa	6	2	0	7	2	0	2	1	8
QPR	6	1	2	0	5	4	1	0	8
Sheff Wed	6	1	2	0	5	4	1	0	8
Sheff Utd	6	1	1	4	2	0	1	4	6
Wimbledon	6	2	1	3	2	0	2	1	6
Norwich	6	2	0	5	6	0	3	1	6
Coventry	6	1	2	0	5	3	0	3	5
Everton	6	1	2	5	7	0	1	3	2
Derby Co	6	0	2	1	4	0	3	2	2
Sheff Utd	6	0	1	2	6	0	1	2	4

TEN POINTS from the first seven games of the season have hoisted the Town to their best league table place since Jim Ryan became manager.

For 24 hours at the weekend they were seventh, a position they held for a week a year ago after the five matches.

But they dropped a notch on Sunday when Leeds overtook them on goal difference by beating Sheffield United.

And every team bar Manchester United has a game in hand of the Town, which will vanish on Saturday week when the Town have no fixture.



● RISING STAR: Ceri Hughes is on the ball ahead of Brian Kilcline.