Sports News

● MAESTRO: Steve Williams, very much on the ball.

Mystery of the missing goals

Manager's viewpoint

TOWN MANAGER Jim Ryan was more disappointed with a point against Everton than he had been losing at Sunderland the previous week. For this was a case of two points lost more than one gained.

He felt the team did not do itself justice to match the quality of its performance.

He said: "I was disappointed because we should have won. It was two points lost more than one gained. But you must give credit to Everton because they played well in the second half.

"One goal at home is not enough — when you are one up you can always concede a scruffy little goal, and that was what happened.

"For the play we had we should have scored more goals, but that has been a feature of almost every home game this season. We spend a lot of time in training on finishing.

"It is the hardest job in football and I don't know what more we can do to improve it.

"I probably feel worse today when we have got one point than when we lost at Sunderland last week, because we know we should have had all three points.

"The first 45 minutes was very good — we did everything right except for putting the ball in the net.

"In the second half it changed: Everton came out and stopped us doing so much damage — they plugged a couple of gaps in midfield, and pushed Nevin on to stop Richard Harvey getting forward so much.

"Also we went off the boil a little bit and found it difficult to regain our momentum. And in the last ten minutes we got quite nervous — we had lost two points and seemed to be worried that we might have lost all three.

"But the general performance leaves me fairly pleased, despite feeling quite down about the result. We played a lot of good football.

"Perhaps we have not been consistent enough through 90 minutes in games, but we have always produced good stuff and that much is pleasing. And it is a relatively inexperienced team.

"I just felt it was a shame for the players that they did not get what they deserved."

Everton manager Colin Harvey, under pressure from fans who hate to see the Blues so far adrift of the Reds from the other side of Stanley Park, was delighted with his side's second-half revival.

CHANGE OF TACTICS

He had no complaints about the pitch — a surface on which Everton have now failed to win a league game in six attempts — and admitted that the Town's first-half domination was no less than they deserved for the quality of their play.

He had tried to be strong in defence for the early stages, but changed the tactics at half-time to close down Steve Williams and stop Richard Harvey's overlapping runs down the Town's left wing.

But the crucial factor was the equaliser five minutes after the break — it was a shock to the Town and a confidence-booster for Everton and from then on Mr. Harvey was pleased with what he saw.

"After our goal we played some good football and I thought we looked more likely to win it," he siad. "But I am not unhappy with the draw."

CRUEL CASE OF SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR AWAY

Brian Swain reports
Pictures: Josh Levy

WHEN YOUR FAVOURITE team more than matches one of the so-called big glamour clubs and rises to seventh place in the First Division how can you be disappointed?

Jim Ryan knows, just as much as the rest of us, because a draw against Everton was much less than the Town deserved at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

Once again the pretty football, overpowering stuff in the first half, was a delight to watch, only for the frustration to set in again through the old problem of failing to turn it into the three or four goals that it deserved.

GOALS IN THE BANK?

My consolation is that previous spells like this have been rewarded eventually. Keep playing the right sort of football and the results will come.

For 45 minutes we saw a Town side as smooth and rampant as any I have seen for a long time. Struggling Everton were in danger of being swamped by a tidal wave of smart moves that ran the length of the pitch.

Steve Williams produced his best performance yet until Everton sussed out the need to mark him tighter and with David Preece again showing lovely vision and passing skill those two played a major part in putting Everton on the rack for the whole of the first half. Marvin Johnson and Richard Harvey, on the defensive flanks, were able to become extra attackers and the great shame for the Town and their fans was that the sustained excellence for half the game brought only one goal.

A mixture of bad luck, poor finishing and good goalkeeping by Neville Southall led up to the cruel twist of Everton pinching an equaliser early in the second half and even unjustly being in with a whiff of nicking all three points when nerves ran through the Town side in the last ten minutes or so.

Everton came to defend in numbers and were doing it reasonably well as the Town shot into first gear from the kick-off. Barely 15 seconds had ticked away when the first attack saw Preece in with half a chance after good work by Johnson and Iain Dowie. The shot was whistling towards the bottom corner as Southall produced his first good save of the match.

DEFENDING IN DEPTH

Lars Elstrup was in sparkling form as a left winger and creator, with runs and crosses that have added the extra dimension to his game, and with Williams spraying the ball around brilliantly Everton were forced to play with nine men back for a long time.

Kingsley Black, not yet back to the consistent form he showed before his injury, was always a danger in the right wing and Everton were forced to defend in depth and usually in their own penalty area.

They had a spot of luck when a hand seemed to block a drive by Black and the ref refused penalty claims and when Southall readjusted his position a robatically to flip a cross-shot by Harvey on to the top of the bar.

But the goal that looked inevitable came with 5 minutes gone, with a build-up that was quick as accurate. Williams began it and the ball was moved to the left wing for Harvey to deliver a curling cross with his right foot. Elstrup met it with a cracking header for his seventh goal of the season.

Four minutes later came the incident that has everyone talking as Southall saved a cross from Black by handling well outside his area, and got away with a yellow card.

If that move had brought a goal I think the Town might have embarrassed Everton. Instead the visitors rode their luck and got to the interval still in the game despite having been outplayed by a considerable margin.

Everton's only threat as attackers had been from long-range drives by Neil McDonald, but after the interval they changed to more positive tactics.

MOMENTS OF LUCK

They sat harder on Williams, pushed up on the flanks and profited from two moments of luck before the 50th-minute equaliser. The first came when Martin Keown, emergency fullback in a squad with men out through injury, fouled Williams almost on the by-line. It looked inside the box and I expected the ref to take the usual easy way out by giving an indirect free kick for obstruction.

Instead Mr. Steven Bell of Huddersfield saw it as a foul, but gave it just outside the box. And from the free kick and cross Southall was delighted to see a piledriver by Harvey whistle wide.

And it was wretched luck on the left back that he should be a few inches out of position when John Ebbrell knocked in a hopeful far post cross. The bounce beat Harvey and Pat Nevin scrambled in the equaliser.

For the first time in the game Everton began to look a little dangerous, and with Williams fading and Elstrup slowing down the excitement died away.

● UNLUCKY: Iain Dowie is denied by Neville Southall's lucky save as a second-half chance goes an inch or two astray.

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Town Match Verdict ★★★

● CLOSE: Iain Dowie, with one of his three second-half chances, is too far under the ball and his header flies over the bar.

Yellow card for a keeper: and the ref got it right!

THE BIG TALKING point at Kenilworth Road was whey Everton goalkeeper Neville Southall did not get a red card for deliberate handball to stop Kingsley Black delivering a cross that might have brought the Town a second goal in four minutes.

The majority of fans — including Merseyside football reporters — thought it was a professional foul which FIFA is trying to stamp out and that the Welsh international would be sent off.

FIFA'S FAULT

Instead Huddersfield referee Steven Bell, whose performance generally was not exactly brilliant, got that one right. It turns out that FIFA's latest edict on the pro foul is at fault.

Everton defender Dave Watson admitted that he thought a red card was likely for Southall's offence, and believes a lot of referees would have taken that action.

But Town boss Jim Ryan said: "I knew the goalkeeper was not going to be sent off.

"There is a clear distinction in the law between handball and a deliberate foul. I am not complaining because I knew that the law says. But the question is whether the law is fair or justified."

Everton's Colin Harvey said he also knew the yellow card was the right punishment, and so did Southall.

INSTINCTIVE

Said the visiting manager: "There were five or six players behind Neville so I am not sure it could be called an offence to deny an opponent a scoring chance.

"Neville said he did what he had to do. It was an instinctive save."

And Kingsley Black confirmed that he was not shooting for goal, but was trying to cross for other players to have a chance of scoring.

The Dane eventually had to go off because of an ankle injury he has received in the first minute.

It is tempting to believe that ended the Town's striking ability — except that Dowie and sub Jason Rees both had chances created by slick moves.

Three times in as many minutes Dowie put the wind up Southall. From a quick free kick by Preece he was denied by Southall's dive at his feet. Then from five or six yards he headed over the top when he looked like scoring after a cross by Black and a flick-on by Rees. Finally Dowie did brilliantly to fling himself at a cross by Black to send a header thundering wide — a superb attempt that one because it was a miracle he got there at all.

The last good chance fell to Rees from a perfect chipped centre by Williams. Inexperience showed as the youngster tried a volley and skied it over the bar when a better touch might have brought the first league goal of his career.

That was the trouble on Saturday — it was a 'might have been' day.

Up into the top seven

ALTHOUGH IT was generally seen as a day when two points had been lost, the one gained against Everton was enough to push the Town up one place in the First Division, to seventh.

With the season now just past its quarter-time mark 14 points from the first ten games is two points and five places better than a year ago.

On Saturday Spurs did the Town a favour by winning at Nottingham, which enabled the Town to overtake Forest.

But the real surprise was at Southampton, where Mick Harford's goal gave Derby their first victory since last April. It might give them a lift for the Town's visit on Saturday, but they are still two points adrift of Everton.

Sheffield United are now the only First Division side without a win this season and a clamped to the bottom after being beat 1-0 at home by Coventry.

Today's First Division table:

	HOME					AWAY					Pts
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	
Liverpool	10	5	0	0	12	1	4	1	0	10	5	28
Arsenal	10	4	1	0	9	2	3	2	0	9	3	24
Tottenham	10	4	1	0	13	3	2	3	0	4	1	22
C. Palace	10	3	2	0	10	7	2	3	0	7	2	20
Man City	10	4	1	0	10	5	0	4	1	5	7	17
Man United	10	3	0	2	8	5	1	2	2	5	9	14
Luton Town	10	2	2	1	4	3	2	0	3	7	12	14
A. Villa	10	2	3	0	8	4	1	1	3	5	6	13
Leeds	10	1	2	2	7	7	2	2	1	6	4	13
Sustm For	10	2	1	2	8	7	1	3	1	5	6	13
QPR	10	2	1	2	8	5	1	2	2	8	11	12
Coventry	10	2	2	1	9	6	1	0	4	2	7	11
Wimbledon	10	0	3	2	4	8	2	2	1	7	6	11
So'ton	10	2	1	2	7	6	1	1	3	6	11	11
Chelsea	10	2	3	0	8	6	0	1	4	5	12	10
Norwich	10	2	1	2	7	10	1	0	4	4	9	10
Sunderland	10	2	2	1	6	4	0	1	4	6	12	9
Everton	10	1	2	2	8	7	0	2	3	5	10	7
Derby Co	10	0	3	2	3	7	1	0	4	3	9	6
Sheff Utd	10	0	1	4	3	9	0	2	3	3	10	3

Match details

LUTON TOWN 1 EVERTON 1
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Chamberlain; Johnson, Beaumont, Dreyer, Harvey; Williams, Hughes, Preece; Elstrup (Rees 61 mins), Dowie, Black. Other sub: McDonough.
EVERTON: Southall; Atteveld, Ratcliffe, Watson, Keown; Nevin, McDonald, McCall, Ebbrell; Cottee, Sharp. Subs not used: Newell and Younds.
THE GOALS: Lars Elstrup, header from Richard Harvey's cross, 24th minute; Pat Nevin for Everton, 50th minute, after John Ebbrell's far post cross had foxed Richard Harvey.
OTHER STRIKES: Town five saved and ten wide; Everton five saved, four wide. Corners: 6-6.
REFEREE: Steven Bell, Huddersfield. Turned out to be right over a potential flashpoint incident when Neville Southall handled outside the box and got a yellow card instead of a red one. But several other decisions looked dubious to say the least.
ALSO BOOKED: Steve Williams for dissent and Richard Harvey for an alleged body-check on Pat Nevin who ran straight at him.
ATTENDANCE: 10,047, a rise of 500 on Everton's visit last season.
ENTERTAINMENT: Smashing first half, but then disappointing that so much good football faded before the goals it deserved had been scored.

The season so far

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

August			
25 C. 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)	1-0 (Black)	10,185	8
15 QPR (a)	1-6 (Hughes)	10,196	11
22 Coventry (h)	1-0 (Dowie)	8,336	7
29 Norwich (a)	3-1 (Elstrup 3)	12,794	6
October			
20 Sunderland (a)	0-2	20,025	8
27 Everton (h)	1-1 (Elstrup)	10,047	7

LEAGUE APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Chamberlain 10, Beaumont 10, Dreyer 10, Hughes 10, Preece 10, Elstrup 10, Dowie 10, Black 10, Breacker 8, James 6(1), Harvey 4(2), Rees 4(5), McDonough 3 (2), Williams 3, Nogan (3), Johnson 2 (2).

LEAGUE GOALS: Elstrup 7, Dowie 2, Black and Hughes 1.

THE RUMBELOWS CUP

September			
25 Bradford (h)	1-1 (Harvey)	5,120	
October			
10 Bradford (a)	1-1 (Black) — lost on pens	6,180	

APPEARANCES: Chamberlain 2, Dreyer 2, Beaumont 2, Hughes 2, Preece 2, Black 2, Dowie 2, Harvey 2, Rees 1 (1), James 1 (1), Nogan 1 (1), Breacker 1, Elstrup 1, Williams 1, Johnson (1).

GOALS: Harvey and Black one each.

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