Sports News

QUALITY POINT AT

Brian Swain reports
Pictures by Josh Levy

● HANDY: Iain Dowie and Des Walker getting a little tangled up.

THE GOAL OF THE season, followed by the save of the season, highlighted another very good Luton Town performance on Saturday.

Nottingham Forest, pride battered a few days earlier when they lost a cup-tie 5-4 at Coventry, were never allowed to put a smile on the face of Brian Clough as the Town got within 15 minutes of victory.

LIKE BANKS v PELE

Lars Elstrup grabbed the Sunday morning headlines for his two goals, the second a real gem, a model of calmness and precision.

Alec Chamberlain competed for the man of the match award for a save to preserve the Town's lead that ranks with the famous Gordon Banks stop against Pele.

But the draw, which most of us would have settled for on the way to the game, was down to the part everyone played in a system the players like.

Forest had several men who were not allowed to hit top form. The Town had no-one doing anything less than a competent job.

A defence without David Beaumont had a few hairy moments, but even under Forest's second half pressure there was nice organisation and teamwork. Richard Harvey, for instance, faced a major problem with the pace of Franz Carr, Forest's man of the match.

SKIPPER HELPS OUT

The right winger was involved in both Forest goals, but John Dreyer's ability to give and take as a young left back meant that Carr was denied the intimate prize.

Marvin Johnson is still playing out of his skin to keep Julian James sidelined, despite frightening some of us by some of his brave excursions upfield.

Best of all the midfield is now a very efficient and well-balanced unit.

Steve Williams and David Preece used all their experience, and at times they were leading a Town pattern that was close to taking the Mick, cheekily and confidently playing the ball around in their own half, and defying Forest to do anything about it.

And it was not only a matter of using time — it helped to reduce Forest to a state of abject terror until Brian Clough got at them in the interval.

Ceri Hughes was strong and dependable up front, midfield defensive work while Preece and Williams concentrated on taking the sting out of things and providing a service for Kingsley Black, Iain Dowie and Lars Elstrup.

THRUST OF A RAPIER

With Black floating, Dowie and Elstrup did a remarkable job together, with Dowie the physical threat and the Dane the rapier thrust expert. Even Forest fans applauded his goals.

We had suffered two early shocks. In the first minute Darron McDonough made his only mistake, missing a long punt down the middle. Dreyer tidied up but his back pass beat Chamberlain and rolled a few inches wide of the empty goal.

Five minutes later Forest got the goal that could have been crucial. Johnson was caught upfield when a Town attack broke down, and Stuart Pearce used the space behind him brilliantly.

He swapped passes with Nigel Jemson, crossed to the inside left position, and as the Town defenders were drawn towards him Gary Parker's header switched play to the right.

Carr, in space, carefully controlled the ball, and thumped in a low drive past Chamberlain's left hand, with Harvey an inch or two short of making a block.

WALKER LOOKS LIKE ONE

But the Town were unruffled by the setback and at the 15th minute Forest fans watched in amazement as Elstrup beat Des Walker for pace, something they do not see too often.

The Dane collected a pass by Williams, went past Walker, held off Steve Chettle, and shot his second goal of the season.

Forest were lucky to be level at the interval, with Johnson and Black both hitting shots that were scrambled away as the goalkeeper was beaten.

And 44 seconds after the interval Elstrup delivered another blow to Forest confidence with a stunning goal to remember.

It started with Johnson crossing diagonally. Dowie beat Chettle in the air to head on towards Elstrup, who was on the edge of the box in the inside right position.

PERFECT CURLED SHOT

He turned clear of Pearce and Chettle, and curled a left-footer beyond Crossley into the far top corner.

Forest responded by raising their game, and put the Town under a lot of pressure.

Keane shot into the side netting when he should have scored and Clough, Jemson and Laws all had shots charged down.

Chamberlain's amazing save came with 68 minutes gone when Keane was put clear down the middle and from about ten yards he shot hard and low for the corner. Chamberlain had no right to get anywhere near it but flung himself down and palmed the shot almost from ground and on to the bar, and a grateful defence scrambled the ball clear.

EQUALISER

The Town had to work hard to keep out a team that suddenly believed in itself again, and David Beaumont had just made his return for the injured Hughes when the equaliser arrived, in the 75th minute.

Carr, the quickest and trickiest man on view, crossed from the right and Nigel Clough's header was perfectly placed.

After that Forest came closest to winning, with Keane getting clear again and once more denied by a good save, and sub Phil Starbuck heading against the top of the bar from yet another good centre by Carr.

At the end both sets of fans could claim their side might have won it, so perhaps the draw was right — neither team deserved to lose.

'Best save I have seen for years'

JIM RYAN was disappointed that his men had not been able to hold on for all three points at Nottingham, but very pleased with the team's performance.

And he thought the result was about right when he reflected on the flow of the game, with the Town on top for the first hour or so and Forest then making a late surge.

Like most spectators he picked out two incidents as particularly memorable — Lars Elstrup's brilliant second goal and Alec Chamberlain's unbelievable save 15 minutes later to keep the Town's lead intact.

"That was one of the best saves I have seen for years and years," said the Town manager.

But he stressed that every man had played his part in taking the game to Forest on a day when the home players and manager were likely to be well fired up after losing 5-4 in a midweek cup game at Coventry.

Said the boss: "That result was the worst thing that could have happened from our point of view as preparation for this game."

The Town's strategy had been to try to withstand the early assault they knew would come after Mr. Clough's tongue had done its work.

CONFIDENCE AND CONTROL

Except for the early goal Forest were not allowed another shot at goal in the first half, and the Town boss wondered if his men got a little nervous after going 2-1 up in the first minute of the second half.

Forest responded with a lot of pressure, but there were also times when the Town's possession football was full of confidence and control, which was what the manager is looking for.

"People make individual errors, which will always happen in football. But generally we feel our system suits the players, and each man was doing his job well at Nottingham.

But the boss added: "I like to gamble to win all three points — three is a nice reward and it's worth trying for all three. That was my only disappointment because we know we could have won it. But overall I expect Forest think the same so we have to be pleased with another away point."

The First Division

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	15	6	1	0	18	3	6	1	1	14	9	38
**Arsenal	15	6	1	0	16	2	5	3	0	14	4	35
C. Palace	15	4	3	0	12	8	4	3	1	12	7	30
Tottenham	15	6	1	2	0	9	2	4	1	7	5	29
Leeds	15	4	2	2	15	9	3	3	1	10	7	26
Man City	15	5	1	1	14	9	0	7	1	10	12	23
*Man Utd	15	5	0	3	14	8	2	3	2	6	9	23
Wimbledon	15	2	4	2	9	11	3	2	2	13	10	21
Chelsea	15	4	4	0	13	9	1	1	5	9	16	20
Luton Town	15	3	3	1	8	5	2	1	5	10	20	19
Nottm For	15	3	2	2	12	9	1	4	3	8	12	18
A. Villa	15	3	4	0	11	6	1	1	6	5	11	17
Norwich	15	4	1	3	12	14	1	1	5	6	12	17
Derby Co	15	2	4	2	7	9	2	0	5	5	13	16
So'ton	15	3	1	3	12	10	1	2	5	8	18	15
Sunderland	15	2	4	2	8	7	1	1	5	8	14	14
Coventry	15	2	3	3	10	10	1	1	5	3	9	13
Everton	15	2	3	3	12	9	0	3	4	6	12	12
QPR	15	2	1	4	10	10	1	2	5	10	19	12
Sheffld Utd	15	0	2	5	3	11	0	2	6	4	17	4

** Two points deducted. * One point deducted.

● SUPER-STRIKE: Lars Elstrup curls in his tenth goal of the season, with Stuart Pearce and Steve Chettle helpless to prevent the Town going 2-1 ahead.

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Town Match Verdict ★★★★

PROVES ITS EITHER END

● DOWN: Elstrup tumbles under a challenge from Stuart Pearce. The penalty appeals fell on deaf ears.

● BALANCED: Kingsley Black fires in a shot as the Town take the game to Forest. David Beaumont is the man in the background, returning to league action briefly as a sub after recovering from flu.

Match details

NOTTINGHAM FOREST 2 LUTON TOWN 2

Half-time: 1-1

TOWN: Chamberlain; Johnson, McDonough, Dreyer, Harvey; Williams, Hughes (Beaumont 74 mins), Preece; Black, Dowie, Elstrup. Other sub: Farrell.
FOREST: Crossley; Laws, Walker, Chettle, Pearce; Keane, Parker, Crosby; Carr, Jemson (Starbuck, 72 mins), Clough.
THE GOALS: Franz Carr for Forest, sixth minute low shot from Forest's right after they opened up the Town down the left and switched it; Lars Elstrup for the Town, 15th minute, accurate shot after beating Des Walker for pace to capitalise on a pass by Steve Williams; Elstrup again, 44 seconds after the interval, superb placed curling drive into the top corner from the edge of the box after Iain Dowie headed on Marvin Johnson's pass down the middle; Nigel Clough near post header for Forest, 75th minute, from centre by Carr.
OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved and five wide; Forest four saved including one super-stop by Alec Chamberlain to deflect a shot on to the bar; two wide and a late header hit the bar. Corners: 9-5 to the Town.
REFEREE: Roger Dilkes, Lancashire. Let an awful lot go, including a studs-in high challenge by Jemson on Chamberlain that deserved a booking at least.
BOOKED: No-one.
ATTENDANCE: 16,498, Forest's lowest league gate of the season so far.
ENTERTAINMENT: Very pleasant for Town supporters. Disappointment at being ahead until 15 minutes from time is counterbalanced by the knowledge that Forest's late surge could have nicked a win they surely did not deserve.

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
November
3 Derby (a) 1-2 (Black) 15,008 8
10 Liverpool (a) 0-4 ..... 35,2017 13
17 Man City (h) 2-2 (Dowie, Dreyer pen) 9,564 12
24 A. Villa (h) 2-0 (Black, Elstrup) 10,071 9
December
1 N. Forest (a) 2-2 (Elstrup 2) 16,498 10

LEAGUE APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Ever-presents, 14 each: Chamberlain, Dreyer, Hughes, Preece, Elstrup and Dowie; Black 14, Beaumont 13(1), Harvey 10(2), Williams 8, Johnson 7 (2), James 6(1), McDonough 5(4), Rees 4(5), Nogan (4), Farrell (2), Breacker 8. Number of players used, 15 games: 17. Last season's total: 27.

LEAGUE GOALS: Elstrup 10, Dowie and Black 3, Dreyer 1 pen, 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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