

KINGSLEY CURES CHRISTMAS HANGOVER

90/91
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A TYPICALLY clinical finish from Kingsley Black finally relieved Luton's Christmas hangover, ending a miserable festive season for the Hatters.

And when referee Michael Reed blew his whistle, 30 seconds into injury time, you could sense that feeling in the crowd too, alongside the cheers as Jim Ryan's team finally rediscovered winning form.

Admittedly Chelsea were lacking the likes of internationals Townsend, Durie and Nicholas, but that won't bother Ryan who said before the game it was the result that mattered, not the manner in which it was achieved.

So it will thus be of much comfort to the manager that the performance was good as well, especially in the second half.

The horrors of Tottenham and the gloom of Sheffield United were forgotten as the Town recorded only their second win in 12 league outings to end the year on a happy note.

It was certainly a happy Ryan who afterwards pointed out:

"We played today like Luton Town teams are expected to play, and sometimes it takes a really poor performance to shake you out of the bad things.

LUTON TOWN 2 CHELSEA 0

"We got back to doing the things we're good at, and it was a good open game that was entertaining for the fans."

The 2-0 triumph vindicated Ryan's decision to replace Ian Dowie with Sean Farrell up front, and bring the lively Jason Rees into midfield.

Of Dowie's omission, for the first time in the league this season, the manager commented:

"It wasn't so much a case of leaving Dowie out, but of a player who has been pushing his claims for a long time.

"He has deserved his chance and did a good job for us."

Farrell was inches away from celebrating his full league debut with goal, amid much confusion surrounding the first Luton score.

Preece's free kick in fact came off Chelsea's Cundy, after Farrell and Lars Elstrup were both credited with the final touch.

But Farrell and Elstrup struck up a good partnership, and the 21-year-old debutant later steered the ball back to Black to crack in the

goal which sealed the game.

Chelsea were left to regret missing golden opportunities in the first period, with Dixon twice a culprit.

The Blues usually play good football at Kenilworth Road and were always dangerous on the break.

In many ways their attacking style suited Luton, but there were anxious moments for the home side, not least on 22 minutes when Stuart rounded Alec Chamberlain only to see McDonough clear the goal-bound effort.

Having weathered that storm, Luton dominated after the break, with a Marvin Johnson header cleared off the line, and Elstrup twice going close.

But the two goals sounded that audible relief for the 11,050 crowd.

A year which began in turmoil, found triumph and joy in May, and new hope in September, ended thankfully in three points with good prospects for the year ahead.