

Sports News

Was it a point won — or two thrown away?

DAVIE PLEAT was in two minds about the real value of Saturday's home point against Liverpool.

The managers' viewpoints

"You reflect afterwards and get greedy," he said when he was asked if it was a point gained or two thrown away.

"When Liverpool had 11 men on the field Saunders missed a marvellous chance," admitted the Town boss. "But in the first half we played capably and strongly."

Needed more width

"In the second half against ten men we needed to stretch them and we didn't do that well enough. We tried to play over the length of the field rather than over the width. I don't think we used Black to maximum effect."

"There were plenty of good things, but it was somewhat disappointing not to win. It was an opportunity."

There was admiration for the way Liverpool tackled their task after McMahon's early departure, and the Town boss agreed that in the closing stages the visitors might have snatched a winner.

"They did very well when they played Saunders wide on the right, and McManaman on the left, with Rosenthal in the middle. I got a feeling

our defenders were a little anxious, perhaps nervous of reputations.

"I would like to have seen it 11 men against 11 — I think it would have been a very exciting game in the last 20 minutes."

"But for the second successive game we have been in a match that has been spoiled by one team having to play with ten men."

The boss was not happy with the quality of crosses when the Town did get down the flanks. "We should have knocked them viciously and quick, and not hang them up, because we haven't got six-foot-four forwards."

"But there were a lot of good things for us: the whole team defended together OK generally. But we didn't show enough invention, particularly in the second half, to attack together."

Clean sheet

"And it was important that we kept another clean sheet."

Liverpool manager Graeme Souness said Steve McMahon deserved to be sent off for elbowing Philip Gray, and he felt that overall he had to be happy to collect an away point.



● **RISING STARS:** Brian Stein and Steve Nicol jump to it.

CLEAN SHEET IS ONLY HALF

PLEASURE AT SEEING Luton Town hold Liverpool to a draw in the first home game of the season was tempered for me by the way the Town rarely looked like breaking their scoring duck.

SKIPPER IS SIGNED

TREVOR Peake, who took over from John Dreyer as Town captain at Highbury last night, signed for the Town after watching the Liverpool game. Full report and picture: Back page.

Perhaps we will have to wait for a few months to put the result into a proper context, but the low-key contest with the former champions underlined why manager David Pleat still wants to make more changes to try to equip the club for a place in the Premier League.

Changes

It was the Town's good fortune to be meeting Liverpool while they are seeking the right combination and balance after major changes at Anfield. They were without eight first team squad men, including Jan Molby, Mark Wright, John Barnes and Ian Rush. A ninth, skipper Ronnie Whelan, limped off with a groin strain in the 23rd minute.

It is difficult to know what effect foolish

Menacing

And Liverpool always looked more menacing in attack. David Pleat has opted to get the defence right first, which was why former Coventry skipper Trevor Peake has been bought to add height, power and leadership to the side,

Threat

For both teams on a warm afternoon it was a game where plenty was threatened but not achieved.

Perhaps the price of the Town's tighter determination in defence was to reduce the at-



● **ON THE BALL:** Gray and Gary Ablett in competition.

Town match verdict ★★

All-ticket order reduces income

THE TOWN are to hold further discussions with the Police about the need for all-ticket games after Liverpool's visit attracted 2,000 fewer than Kenilworth Road's capacity.

It represents a cash shortfall the Town can ill afford.

Away fans will be offered all 2,274 £13.50 seats in the Oak Road stand. Liverpool had 733 unsold. It's going to look a little odd when Wimbledon come!

The Town had 1,500 unsold tickets available to their fans. Supporters were unable to buy tickets on the day, in contrast to what happened at Upton

Park a week earlier.

There, the Metropolitan Police decided at the last minute to let in Town fans without tickets, which was a source of aggravation to those who had bought in advance. "It is something which will not be repeated at Kenilworth Road," said the Town's General Manager Bill Tomlins.

The club say all home games are effectively all-ticket matches, because home fans have to buy membership cards first.

The membership list is 14,000 names long, and no-one wants to see a big lock-out in a ground where only 11,000 home fans can be housed.

But capacity is rarely threatened at all-ticket games. The Town accept that the Police have an over-riding vote for public safety reasons, but they believe Saturday's game, with not a hint of bother in the ground, gives them cause to suggest that restrictions could be relaxed more often than the Police are suggesting.

By the end of the game there had been three arrests: one drunk and two would-be ticket touts.



● **BACKING UP:** Brian Stein closely marked by Gary Ablett.

PLATFORM THE BATTLE

Kenilworth Road action pictures: Josh Levy

Black and Richard Harvey combined well to make a chance for Gray, on his full debut, but it had to be taken under pressure and the volley was too high.

three yards, with the target unprotected.

Sent off

Five minutes later came McMahon's red card, as well deserved as Sean Farrell's had been at Coventry.

It made a little more space in midfield, and for a spell the Town had the better of it, with Preece the hub of a lot of good things.

Mark Pembroke had another excellent game on the right, but both he and Black took the edge off a lot of good work by not making best use of the ball when they got down the wings.

High ball crosses left Gray outnumbered in the air, when Stein, for one, might have been more dangerous if the ball had been hit hard and low.

Miss

They did as they were told, and within a minute of the restart McMahon's fierce drive was parried and Dean Saunders should have scored his first goal for Liverpool after his £2.9million move from Derby. Instead he scooped the ball over the bar from about

Flourish

Still, saying it is easier than doing it against a team like Liverpool, and towards the end their ten men came with a late flourish after Alec Chamberlain had done well to finger-tip a drive by Mike Marsh over the bar.

For their late assault

Liverpool switched Saunders to the right, with the lively Steve McManaman on the left, and sent on Ronnie Rosenthal to operate down the middle.

The Israeli, famous as the current Anfield supersub when he might well have been a Luton Town star instead, very nearly settled matters in the 84th minute, six minutes after replacing Mark Walters, who had got nowhere against David Beaumont.

Off the line

Rosenthal brilliantly lobbed Chamberlain after an alarming gap opened up in the middle of the Town defence, but Graham Rodger raced back to hook clear off the line, with Liverpool appealing in vain for a goal to be given.

Before we moan about two home points being lost, we might wait to see how many other teams do well for 84 minutes before Liverpool strike and steal all three.



● **PRESSURE:** Graham Rodger up for a set piece, and Grobbelaar struggles. The sequel is shown on the left.

Thinking of a short cut

ON THE DAY Luton Town marched into a new era, hoping to make friends throughout football again with the plastic surface scrapped and away fans back for league matches, the manager was questioning his own judgement about the preparation of the pitch.

Everyone at the club is delighted with the way the new grass has grown in barely three months. The decision that had to be made two days before the first game was about how short it should be cropped. For long-term benefit groundsman Dave Chapman was ordered to leave the grass longer than usual.

Beaten by the bounce

There was some amusement for visiting Pressmen in the first few minutes when Kingsley Black was left helpless by a high bounce. But both teams were happy with the way the pitch played, except for the doubt expressed by David Pleat.

As things turned out, he said, it might have helped the Town to quicken the game when Liverpool were down to ten men if the grass had been cut shorter. Instead, the lush holding surface was of more benefit to the visitors.

Red card completes a shambles at Coventry

THE determination to keep a clean sheet against Liverpool was born from a desperate defensive flop against Coventry.

The Town were a shambles at Highfield Road, and deserved defeat for defending which David Pleat condemned as horrific.

Striker sent off

John Dreyer had one of the worst nightmares, and so did Sean Farrell, who should be ashamed on two counts for his sending off in the 17th minute.

His clattering foul on Trevor Peake, a fellow pro, and now a Town colleague, was no credit to football, nor to Farrell. It was also a blow to his team, which was already a goal down.

Three down at the interval, the ten men had no chance of fighting back, but there was at least a 20-minute spell after the break when the Town looked something like a football team.

Philip Gray went on in place of Brian Stein, and was much more menacing as Kingsley Black joined him in attack.

COVENTRY CITY 5 LUTON TOWN 0

Mr. Pleat kept his anger private, and insisted that he and his players would learn lessons. They had certainly been taught one.

If the ten men could have held out until half-time at only two down, he said, he felt they had a chance of getting back into it.

But Coventry netted a third in injury time, and the three-goal lead enabled them to cruise through the second half.

Gaps at the back

At least the Town kept plugging away, but inevitably the search for the season's first goal to restore a little pride left spaces in midfield and defence, and Coventry took advantage to score two more in three minutes midway through the second half.

The match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Beaumont, Rodger, Dreyer, Harvey; Pembroke, McDonough, Preece, Black, Stein (Gray HT); Farrell.

COVENTRY: Ogrizovic; Borrows, Pearce, Peake, McGrath; Woods, Robson, Gynn, Smith; Rosario, Gallacher (Furlong, 68 mins).

GOALS: Two for Kevin Gallacher, 6 and 38 mins; Robert Rosario in injury time at the end of the first half; David Smith, 67 mins; Paul Furlong 71 mins.

OTHER STRIKES: Town two saved, seven wide, one netted by Graham Rodger but disallowed for hands; Coventry six saved, five wide and one hit a post leading to a goal from the rebound. Corners: 6-3 to Coventry.

SENT OFF: Sean Farrell for playing Trevor Peake with his elbow. Booked: Robert Rosario for delaying a free kick; Stewart Robson, dismissed.

REFEREE: Mike Bailey, Cambridge. The Town boss thought he was wrong to send off Farrell. I thought the ref was right, and Philip Gray might have been lucky to escape a caution when he went down in a heap in what looked like an attempt to con the ref into believing Andy Pearce had committed violence.

ATTENDANCE: 10,084, including a good Town following who deserved more for their money from their team.

ENTERTAINMENT: Truly awful for Town fans as the defence assisted in laying on goals for Coventry and the attack rarely looked like profiting at the other end.