

Sports News



● **ON THE BALL:** David Preece, one of the Town's best players, who revelled in a more attacking role than usual, playing wide on the left flank.



● **UNLUCKY:** A shot by Mick Harford is unwittingly deflected by Brian Stein.

RUTHLESS CRUSH THE

AT HALF-TIME at Old Trafford, with Luton Town only one down to the league leaders, I was dreaming of a possible recovery to snatch a point.

But the next 45 minutes were a nightmare as Manchester United powered through a brittle side to heap more agony on the First Division's worst defensive record, hitting four goals in the last 27 minutes.

The turning point was a 63rd-minute penalty, and at two down we knew the Town had no chance.

United got stronger and added three more as the Town kept the game open in the hope of gaining a scrap of consolation at the other end.

Unreal

The margin of defeat may have been a little unreal, but again we had grim confirmation that the present Luton Town team, for all its genuine endeavour, is a fair way short of the best in English soccer.

One reason was clear at Old Trafford: from a crowd of 46,491 United make more cash on pies and programmes than the Town do on the turnstiles.

They left out a bunch of internationals, and one, Brian McClair, was on the bench.

And once they went two up they were ruthless destroyers in every department.

They are also good all-rounders: when Paul Ince put them ahead in

Brian Swain reports

At the 23rd minute he became the ninth United man to score this season.

Tested

Goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel almost became the tenth, because except for the goal the only time Alec Chamberlain was tested in the first 45 minutes was when a big punt by the Dane bounced once and threatened to creep in just beneath the crossbar.

The opening goal, after a dull first 23 minutes, followed a free kick by John Dreyer which, inevitably, was won in the air by Mick Harford.

From the knock-down Mark Pembroke laid the ball back to David Preece, and his clever chip over the top sent Harford and Brian Stein stretching for it.

A touch would have silenced the Stretford end, but Schmeichel beat them to it by an inch or two.

Threat

From his long clearance the Town were caught stretched, and Steve Thompson, under pressure from Bryan Robson, failed to get power behind a back pass, and Ince pounced.

Thompson, used as a

Relentless

There was a relentless passion and power about United, backed by a continuing roar from the biggest crowd that has watched any English league game so far this season.

Wholesale team changes by United had minimised the tiring effects of their 0-0 midweek European game in Greece, where players lost up to 10lb in the heat.

Ryan Giggs the latest United wonder-kid, came in fresh, and one

Torched

But it also highlighted once again that the Town were having to use men against boys. When the heat came on in the second half, they were put to the torch.

Sadly, one of the men no longer looking good enough was Brian Stein. The pace of English football today is a lot quicker than when he left three years ago, and it showed. At 33, with a slightly dodgy knee, he is given no time to be the same bright star he was a few years ago.

Harford was an often short of support, and the problem was worse after the interval as the Town had to defend deeper and deeper.

Giggs had a goal disallowed because he had fouled Jackson, but making the pass to referee Allan Gunn.

United were a goal down at half-time, but they were not out of the game.

Match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Jackson; Beaumont 82 mins; Rodger, Peake, Dreyer; McGonough, Thompson (Telfer 63 mins); Preece; Stein (Nolan 63 mins); Harford.

RANGERS: Stejskal; Macdonald, Tilson, Middle, (Holloway 9 mins); Barker, Sinton; Walsh (Bailey 80 mins); Thompson.

GOAL: Simon Barker, 47 mins. OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved and four wide. Rangers six saved and eight wide. Corners: 8-3 to Rangers.

REFEREE: Paul Durkin. PENALTIES: Paul Durkin. ENTERTAINMENT: In very good supply for Town fans.

Luton Tn 0 QPR 1

Rangers snatched victory with a 47th minute goal by skipper Simon Barker. Ian Holloway and Andy Sinton worked the opening after David Preece and Steve Thompson lost the ball near the halfway line.

Roy Wegerle had been dropped by the Rangers, and Paul Walsh, on loan from Spurs after effectively being sacked for punching reserve coach Ray Clemence, led their lively attack with dash and determination, and on the run of play Rangers deserved the points.

Town match verdict ★★



● **DEBUT SUCCESS:** Paul Telfer in his first full league game.

LEADERS DREAMS

Pictures: Josh Levy

made a much stranger decision in the 63rd minute.

Penalty

The Town defence got into a tangle at a corner, and Mark Hughes drove in from close range. The ball hit Pembroke, covering at the far post, on the knee and then the hand.

The crowd's roar of appeal for a penalty was answered, which means the ref thought the handball was deliberate. In which case Pembroke should have been sent off.

Goal kick

Instead Mr. Gunn, surrounded by pleading Town players about the obvious unfairness of a red card, settled for a yellow.

A linesman was then seen to be waving his flag, and the Town say that he told the referee the ball had swung out of play then in again from the corner, so the correct decision should have been a goal kick.

No hope

If they are right, Mr. Gunn deserves to be fired instead of enjoying an extended career as a Football League ref.

Steve Bruce scored from the spot, and we

knew then that we had no hope of seeing the Town end a losing record which has lasted through all the 18 trips they have now made to Old Trafford.

Supersub

McClair, dropped from the starting line-up for the first time in his five years with United, went on as sub for Clayton Blackmore, the man who replaced him, and delivered a massive riposte to manager Alex Ferguson, with two goals in four minutes.

Giggs put him through for a low shot which seemed to be within Chamberlain's grasp until the ball squirmed out of his grounded hands and bobbed tantalisingly over the line.

With the Town still trying to attack — Kurt Nogan went on as sub for Stein — United showed the physical power that was to make the margin so cruel with two more goals in the last four minutes.

Rebound

Giggs got round Dreyer to cross for Hughes to head for goal, and although Chamberlain parried McClair was first to the rebound, and netted.

THE MATCH DETAILS

MANCHESTER UTD 5 LUTON TOWN 0
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Chamberlain; Jackson; Beaumont 82 mins; Rodger, Peake, Dreyer; Telfer, Thompson, Pembroke; Preece; Stein (Nolan 63 mins); Harford.

UNITED: Schmeichel; Blackmore (McClair, 60 mins); Bruce, Pallister, Irwin; Phelan, Robson, Webb, Ince; Hughes, Giggs. Other sub: Ferguson.

THE GOALS: Paul Ince 23 mins; Steve Bruce penalty 63 mins; Brian McClair twice, 76 and 80 mins; Mark Hughes, 86 mins.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and five wide; United five saved, seven wide and one netted and disallowed. Corners: 7-2 to United.

BOOKED: Mark Pembroke for handball in the penalty incident. REFEREE: Allan Gunn, Hampshire: spoiled an otherwise good performance by mishandling the penalty affair.

Penalty award was the killer

MANAGER David Pleat, as always, looked for the positive aspects to be gleaned from defeat.

"We were neat and tidy in the first half," he said. "Until the interval United lacked real bite, and we coped very well with them."

Harsh penalty

"But the penalty destroyed us. It was very harsh. Mark Pembroke had no intention of handling the ball: it was whacked at him from a few yards."

"That helped change the game, but there is no point in complaining. We then started pushing forward from midfield and they exploited the space."

"Robson, Ince and Hughes all came on strong, but I think the scoreline is harsh."

"Luton fans who were not there should know that the lads

Manager's viewpoint

gave everything, and it was not a real 5-0. But often if you chase the game that is what happens, especially if the other side have good players to finish.

"But we were second best in the end."

The manager was delighted with the way his players kept calm, sensible and tidy until the penalty.

Money talks

But he felt United had power, physique and strong bodies throughout their team.

"And they can get the cheque book out here on crowds of 46,000, and go and buy the best players."

Town managers have learned to take pleasure from building

teams on a budget, and bringing through home-grown talent.

Said Mr. Pleat: "Telfer played his first full game and did all right. Pembroke is still young and finding his way, and he will be all right."

"Jackson is coming through well and we will be all right. But it is going to be tough and hard. We want some strong minds."

"We won't wither and die. I have said to the players that they have got to take it on the chin and take every opportunity to bounce back."

Settling

He was pleased with the way Steve Thompson is settling into the First Division, and David Preece did well playing wide on the left and getting forward.

"We lacked penetration and we will work on that," said Mr. Pleat. "We probably need a little more power and pace."



● **WATCHFUL:** Steve Thompson well in control as Ryan Giggs tries to get at the Town defence.



● **JUMPING TO IT:** Graham Rodger between Steve Bruce and Brian McClair.

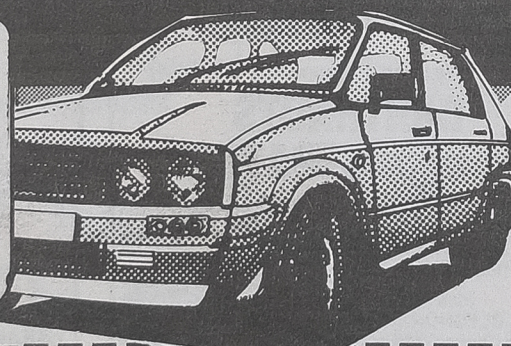
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