

Sports News

ROBBED BY A Referee plays home points

THE REFEREE was almost the excuse for Luton Town's failure to beat Notts County at Kenilworth Road on Saturday.

But manager David Pleat, despite being critical of Jim Rushton of Stoke, accepted that his men should have pressed on to better effect when they had the upper hand in the second half. They had enough of the play to make the result certain, whatever strange decisions the ref came to.

Town claims rejected

The irony was that the Town had three penalty claims disallowed, and two minutes from time the visitors saved a point when Matthew Jackson was penalised for a tackle in which he went for, and got, the ball, before his opponent fell into the soggy turf.

"As soon as I saw that tackle I knew the referee would give them a penalty," said the Town boss. "It is disappointing to lose two home points to a penalty, and not because the other side have played their way through you."

"But you have to accept things like that. And there were some bonuses, particularly the return of Ceri Hughes."

"We're in for a hard season, but we will be all right."

The Town always give referees and visiting teams video recordings of Kenilworth Road matches.

The hope on Saturday night was that Mr. Rushton might look at his performance with a view to learning from it, and improve his game.

They had the feeling, from his reaction, that he did not appreciate the gift too much.

In my view the most blatant mistake came in the 16th minute when Mick Harford was floored as he and Craig Short went up together at the far post to meet a corner by Steve Thompson.

It didn't need video evidence to convince some of us it was a foul on a forward who had got goalside of his marker.

The Town thought later incidents, when Phil Gray and Kurt Nogan were stopped, were also highly debatable, although nothing was given.

By Sports Editor Brian Swain

On a cold, wet and windy day, sliding tackles came into their own as the new grass pitch suffered a real soaking.

That resulted in some clashes being a touch too physical from men able to stop opponents by getting down on their backsides instead of standing up and taking the ball away under control.

County were a mean lot, and their sweeper system, with two men close-marking Harford and Gray, and another always spare to tidy up the errors, made them look like a team that wanted nothing more than a 0-0 draw.

Neither side got in a shot on target in a fitful first half in which the Town played what little good football was on view.

The visitors had a more positive spell early in the second half, and Alec Chamberlain had to go full length to tip a 25-yarder by Dean Thomas round the post.

The Town were the better football side, but it became frustrating as County worked hard to deny space and time for attacks to be built.

Their idea of building attacks was for goalkeeper Steve Cherry to launch 70-yard clearances for Paul Rideout to chase.

Hit a post

Jackson and John Dreyer found it difficult to get upfield very often, but Dreyer was unlucky with a shot which nearly brought the first goal in the 58th minute.

County had blocked an effort by Harford following a long throw by Mark Pembroke, and Dreyer's curling shot from the edge of the box hit the far post, with Gray an inch or two short of converting the rebound.

Ceri Hughes replaced Paul Telfer in the 68th minute, and gave the Town more forward thrust on the right flank.

Platform

But as County tried to strengthen their defences on that side, Pembroke hit them with a superb cross from the left.

Harford and Gray competed for it, with Gray credited with the header that sent the ball in off a post.

The First Division

	HOME				AWAY				
	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L
Man Utd	10	4	1	0	12	1	4	1	0
Leeds	10	3	2	0	8	3	2	3	0
Arsenal	10	3	1	1	11	6	2	1	2
Sheff Wed	10	4	0	1	12	6	1	2	2
Chelsea	11	2	3	1	12	8	2	2	1
Coventry	11	4	1	2	10	3	1	1	2
Tottenham	8	1	0	2	4	5	4	1	0
Man City	11	3	0	3	8	8	2	1	2
Liverpool	9	3	2	0	8	4	1	1	2
Norwich	11	2	3	1	7	6	1	3	1
Notts Co	11	2	1	2	9	2	2	2	8
C. Palace	10	2	1	1	8	7	1	1	8
Nottm For	10	3	1	1	12	9	1	0	4
Everton	11	2	3	0	9	4	1	1	4
Oldham	10	3	1	1	11	7	1	0	4
A. Villa	11	2	1	2	6	4	1	2	3
Wimbledon	10	2	0	2	9	7	1	2	3
West Ham	11	1	2	2	5	6	1	3	2
QPR	11	0	4	1	5	7	1	2	3
Luton Town	11	2	2	1	5	4	0	1	5
So'ham	11	1	1	4	4	13	1	3	5
Sheff Utd	11	1	2	3	4	8	0	1	4

The season so far

THE TOWN'S record in league and cup competition so far:

Barclays League First Division

August									
17 West Ham (a) 0-0	25,079	—							
21 Coventry (a) 0-5	10,084	—							
24 Liverpool (h) 0-0	11,132	—							
27 Arsenal (a) 0-2	25,898	21							
31 Chelsea (a) 1-4 (Gray)	17,457	22							
September									
4 Southampton (h) 2-1 (Gray, Harvey)	8,055	19							
7 Wimbledon (a) 0-3	3,231	20							
14 Oldham (h) 2-1 (Harford 2)	9,005	17							
17 QPR (h) 0-1	9,185	19							
21 Man Utd (a) 0-5	46,491	21							
28 Notts Co (h) 1-1 (Gray)	7,629	20							

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Eleven each by Chamberlain, Dreyer, Pembroke, and Preece; Rodger 9(1), McDonough 9; Stein 9; Peake 7, Jackson 6(2), Gray 6(2), Beaumont 6(2), Harvey 5, Harford 4, Thompson 4, Farrell 3(1), Telfer 2(3), Nogan 1(6), Holsgrove 1, Hughes 1(1), Black 4, Glover 1.

Number of players used: 21, same as last season's total.

LEAGUE GOALS: Gray 3, Harford 2, Harvey 1.

The Rumbelows Cup

Round 2(1):

Sept 25 Birmingham (h) 2-2 (Gray, Nogan).....6,315

APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: One each by Chamberlain, Jackson, Dreyer, Rodger, Beaumont, Pembroke, Thompson, Preece, Telfer, Stein, Gray, Nogan (1), Salton (1).

Town match verdict ★★★

LATE PENALTY

crucial role as two more slip on a spot decision

Action pictures: Josh Levy

Perhaps to a large degree the conditions and slippery surface beat both teams. The ref did little to help the game, and five bookings made it sound harder than it was.

Gray received one of those, rightly, for a foul

on the goalkeeper, and later Cherry indicated in another clash that Gray had spat at him.

The keeper said after the game that perhaps it was just a big raindrop.

Mr. Pleat will do what the referee would not. He said he did not

see the incident, but would talk to Gray and look at the video and if the case was proved the player would be fined because spitting was unacceptable.

In the event County made no complaint, and Gray told the boss the

claim was untrue anyway.

But the former Spurs man is looking a very good acquisition, and there were signs that he and Harford, teamed up for the first time, with Brian Stein left out, can be the sort of lethal

spearhead needed to lead the fight for First Division survival.

And the Town are beginning to get more competition for places. Trevor Peake, Darren McDonough and Richard Harvey were all out through injury, and the men who replaced them can point with some pride at their efforts to win three points.

Deserved

They deserved much more than they got, and we can only wait for the old adage about luck balancing out over the course of a season to be proved true.

We must also hope that we are due for better performances by referees than the one we saw on Saturday.

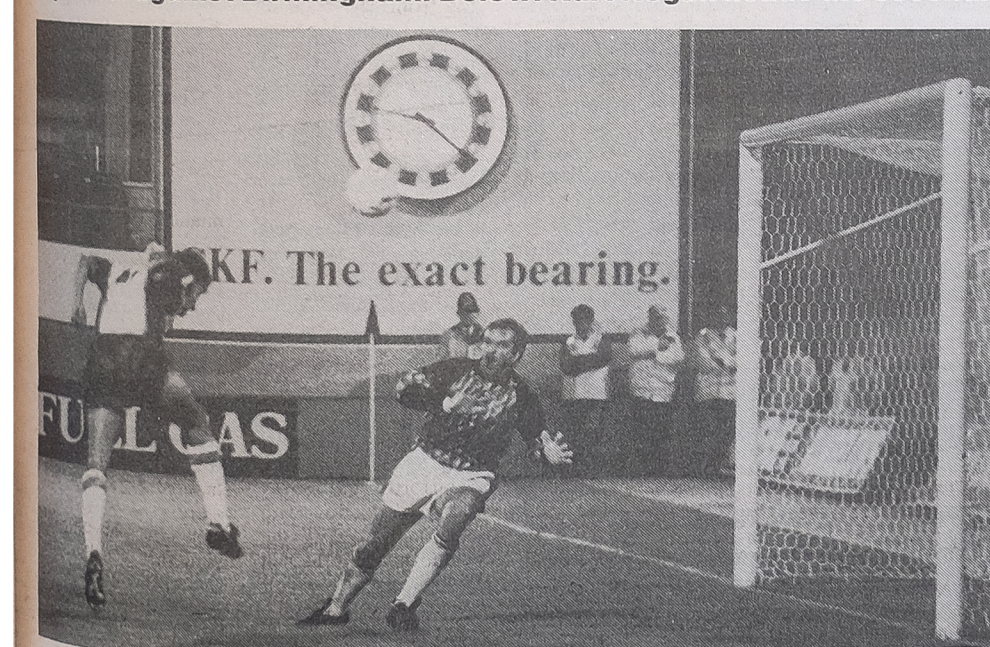
Perhaps Mr. Rushton was miffed because the Town spelled his name wrongly both times it appeared in the match programme!



● TWO GO FOR IT: Philip Gray flies in below Mick Harford to give the Town a deserved lead against Notts County.



● CUP-TIE LEVELLERS: Above, Philip Gray scores the Town's first equaliser against Birmingham. Below: Kurt Nogan heads the second.



HUGHES BACK IN BUSINESS

THE BIGGEST bonus for the Town on Saturday was the long-awaited return of Ceri Hughes.

It was not just the physical recovery after nine months out following a ruptured ligament, but also the crossing of a mental barrier: he was able to play his normal forceful game without worrying if his leg was strong enough to stand tackles.

'Forgotten'

"It's great to be back, and hopefully I can keep fit and play well enough to stay in the First Division," he said.

"It has been the worst time of my life since I was injured, and it was a lot of very hard work to get over it."

"You become a sort of forgotten man, but you have to stick at it. I kept involved, by watching the lads in games and wishing I was out there with them."

David Pleat said the hardest part of getting over a long-term injury is very often the mental approach, and he was impressed at how Hughes had so quickly got into the old groove.

Said the 20-year-old: "I knew it was mostly about confidence, especially when you go into a

tackle. I have got over that, and I know the leg's OK."

Volunteer

Hughes volunteered to play for the reserves at West Ham yesterday, and is hoping that will

set him up to be considered for a place in the starting line-up against Aston Villa on Saturday, against the ground where he made his league debut 18 months ago.

He knows that competition for midfield places has grown since his Boxing Day injury.

Mark Pembroke has become established, and Hughes is much impressed by new signing Steve Thompson.

Work harder

"Competition makes it more fun, and makes you work harder," said Hughes.

His next ambition is to become a regular member of the Town league side and then, if he does well, he hopes Terry Yorath will have a look at him and consider him for a place in the Welsh squad.

All square for the second leg at St. Andrew's

LUTON TOWN 2 BIRMINGHAM 2

The Rumbelows Cup

BOTH managers agreed that the Rumbelows Cup-tie is nicely poised when it resumes at St. Andrew's on Tuesday.

The first leg at Kenilworth Road showed that either side is capable of going through to the third round.

Terry Cooper, the Blues manager, thought the Town had up to 80 per cent of the play, and was well pleased at the way his Third Division side handled their task.

Early goal

Birmingham had the boost of an early goal. Gleghorn fired over a deep cross, and Rogerson, on the right, was left on his own to steer a header into the net.

The Blues defence lived dangerously after that, but the deserved equaliser arrived in the 48th minute. Graham Rodger, skipper in the absence of Peake, sent the excellent Matthew Jackson overlapping down the right wing, and his quick hard cross was the perfect invitation for Gray to mark his return with his third goal in six starts.

The Town gained confidence from that, but after surviving a lot of pressure Birmingham came back with a goal out of the blue. This time Rogerson provided it, getting round John Dreyer and delivering a good cross, and Gleghorn produced the scoring header.

REF: Roger Pawley, Cambridge. Awfully finicky.

ATTENDANCE: 6,315 including 2,000 from Birmingham who often outnumbered the Town following.

ENTERTAINMENT: Patchy at times, with the Town needing to stick at their football to get their fair return, and Birmingham proving to be hard-working and determined.

To their credit the Town came back again, and Thomas was heroic to prevent the tie being just about settled at the first bite.

The Blues held out until seven minutes from time, when Dreyer moved up and crossed for Gray to add a flick-on with his head to confuse the Birmingham defence. Kurt Nogan, who had gone on as sub for Brian Stein, headed his first goal of the season to set up a fascinating second leg.

Match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Jackson, Beaumont, Rodger, Dreyer; Telfer, Thompson, Pembroke, Preece; Stein (Nogan 72 mins), Gray (Salton 83).

BIRMINGHAM: Thomas; Clarkson, Hicks, Marden, Mathewson; Rogerson, Frain, Peer, Gleghorn; Donowa, Sturridge. Subs: Atkins, Okeola, not used.

THE GOALS: Ian Rogerson for Birmingham, 3 mins; Philip Gray for the Town, 48 mins; Nigel Gleghorn for Birmingham 59 mins; Kurt Nogan for the Town, 83 mins.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and five wide. Corners: 5-2 to the Town.

BOOKED: Donowa, for dissent, Rogerson and Sturridge, for dissent, at free kicks, Jackson for a foul on Sturridge.

REF: Roger Pawley, Cambridge. Awfully finicky.

ATTENDANCE: 6,315 including 2,000 from Birmingham who often outnumbered the Town following.

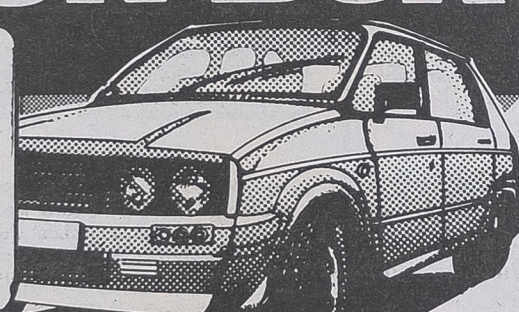
ENTERTAINMENT: Patchy at times, with the Town needing to stick at their football to get their fair return, and Birmingham proving to be hard-working and determined.

SELL YOUR CAR FAST — PUT IT IN A MOTOR BOX

FOUR PAPER COVERAGE FOR ONE WEEK

FOR ONLY £11.00

Prices include VAT



Luton News

TOWN & COUNTRY

DUNSTABLE GAZETTE

Observer

PAY BY CREDIT CARD Just phone in your creditcard number and motorbox details! Deadline Monday 5.30pm

TELEPHONE LUTON (0582) 21222

MOTOR BOX

Fill in the coupon with your car details! (Up to 20 words) All cheques and postal orders to be crossed and made payable to Home Counties Newspapers plc, all cardholder details must be given when paying by credit card. Then send to: Luton News, Grosvenor House, Alma Street, Luton LU1 2PL.

2 WEEKS ☐ £22 Please tick box

Name

Address

Tel No

Credit card no

Signed