

Sports News

IN NEED OF Rangers crush unlikely dream



● **GRAY DAY:** After five months of frustration on the injured list, Phil Gray made his return as a sub against Nottingham Forest, and went on again during the Manchester United game. But he was left out on Monday, with David Pleat deciding that he was not quite right for a third Division One outing in a week.

Striker's return is a happy overture

PHILIP Gray's return to League action put the happy ending to the Easter prelude when he went on as sub against Nottingham Forest.

A remarkable match was full of quick and exciting soccer, with a wet and slippery pitch causing problems for both sides, defenders in particular.

Good football

Three-games-a-week Forest were weakened by injuries after their Rumbelows Cup final defeat by Manchester United, but played some good football.

For Town fans it was a treat to see them come back confidently after the blow of conceding a goal in the second minute.

It was ironic that Kingsley Black should score it, with time and space to get the left foot shot exactly right after Roy Keane and Thor Orlingsson had mounted a swift raid down the Forest right wing.

But that was the worst damage Black was allowed to do, with Julian James having a storming

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game in keeping him at bay, and crowning it with a brilliant winner, his first goal of the season.

As Forest marked space from a corner by David Preece, James hurtled upfield and flung himself horizontally to power a diving header into the net.

Mick Harford's 11th goal of the season had given the Town the equaliser, and they were unlucky not to win by a bigger margin. Harford had a header from a cross by David Preece ruled out for offside, and Imre Varadi clipped the top of the bar with a header from a free kick by Mark Pembroke.

Teddy Sheringham had one in the net for Forest, but that too was offside.

The match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; James, Dreyer, Peake, Harvey; Stein, Kamara, Pembroke, Preece (Gray 72 mins); Varadi (Hughes 79 mins); Harford.

FOREST: Crossley; Crosby,

Walker (Kaminsky HT), Clough, Williams; Orlingsson, Keane, Gemmill, Black; Glover, Sheringham. Other sub: Warner.

THE GOALS: Kingsley Black for Forest, two minutes, careful left foot shot after cross by Thor Orlingsson was pulled back beyond Town defenders slipping and sliding on the wet surface; Mick Harford for the Town, 12 minutes, crisp low shot after Mark Pembroke, David Preece and Chris Kamara built a sweeping passing move down the Town's left; Julian James, powerful diving header from a right wing corner by David Preece in the 24th minute.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town eight saved, six wide, one clipped the top of the bar and one disallowed for offside; Forest four saved, three wide, and one disallowed for offside. Corners: 6-5 to the Town.

REFEREE: Tom Fitzharris, Bolton. Excellent.

ATTENDANCE: 8,014. Very good on a cold and very wet night.

ENTERTAINMENT: Smashing, the best we had seen at Kenilworth Road for a long time, with the slippery conditions adding to the pace of the game. What a bonus to have another cracker a few days later for the visit of Manchester United!

QPR 2 LUTON TOWN 1

and burly Les Ferdinand hit two goals in three minutes to turn the dream into another nightmare.

But we could hardly kid ourselves that the Town were unlucky.

Quicker

Perhaps they took too much out of themselves in the titanic clash with Manchester United.

Whatever the cause, the effect was painfully obvious: the Town did not get their passing game on the road, and Rangers were far quicker on and off the ball, and much more incisive in attack.

Almost nothing went right for the Town until their lucky break penalty.

Chris Kamara had a stomach upset, and was not his forceful self in a

midfield dominated by veteran Ray Wilkins.

Mark Pembroke, who looked like giving the attack the power surges it needed, had to become left back after Richard Harvey was put out of action by a yellow-card two-footed tackle by Bradley Allen.

Mick Harford found Alan McDonald very difficult to shake off, and Scott Oakes, on the right wing, got round the back only once, for a first-half cross which David Bardsley almost turned into his own net.

Pace was the biggest difference between the teams. Ferdinand and Andy Sinton had it in far greater abundance than any Town player, and it was fortunate that Sinton's use of the ball was not as impressive as the ease with which he all

too often skipped clear of Julian James.

Wasteful

Rangers were woefully profligate with their territorial advantage. Manager Gerry Francis said that until the late goals he feared his side would deserve all and get nothing.

The Town's defence had a lot of uneasy moments, but while they lived dangerously the occasional chances came up on the break at the other end.

They rarely looked like being converted, while Rangers were more threatening.

Hit a post

Sinton hit the post in the first half and Allen was denied by a fine save by Chamberlain.

It was a shock when in the 64th minute McDonald carelessly shoved Harford as they

went for a long throw by Pembroke, and the midfielder expertly converted the penalty.

But the Town were not composed enough to defend the lead.

John Dreyer headed weakly at the goalkeeper from a free kick by Preece, and that miss was costly.

Tap-in

With ten minutes to go Sinton and Gary Penrice got past James and from a low cross Ferdinand accepted a tap-in equaliser, and three minutes later he latched on to a through ball by Impey, held off Dreyer, and blasted a cracking drive into the net.

That was a good goal, well taken and made by a shrewd pass.

But David Pleat was much concerned about the equaliser, as the game went into its last ten minutes.

It started with the Town in possession deep in the Rangers' half, and they did not have the professionalism to hold it there.

Break

Rangers mounted a quick break and made it look easy as they sliced through the midfield and right to the Town's goal-line.

But the sad fact for the big following from Luton was that the Town never looked like getting the same penetration into the attacking moves.

They were very pale shadows of the team that did so well against Manchester United only 48 hours before.

Town's Easter verdict ★★ A MIRACLE!



● **POINT-SAVER:** Mick Harford rises above Denis Irwin to head for goal against Manchester United. Seconds later he had headed the rebound off the bar into the net.

The next champs are well matched

FOR entertainment and excitement, lasting to the final minute, the best Easter game was a cracker on Saturday.

Packed out

Kenilworth Road was packed, with every ticket sold, and the crowd was enthralled as the Town more than matched Manchester United, the team David Pleat believes will be crowned as League Champions within a fortnight.

But they were never allowed to look too comfortable by a Town side that hit form in all departments.

Every player was a contender for man of the match honours.

United boss Alex Ferguson admitted that the Town ensured United never got into their rhythm.

Mick Harford's equaliser upset him because the Town's good play that led to it was just what he had expected, and warned his men about.

It was against the run of play, but the Town fought back with great composure and concentration, and the 50th-minute equaliser was the very least they deserved.

United switched their formation to try to find ways of wrestling control, and were glad to see their keeper clutch a curling drive by Pembroke as the Town kept up the attack.

For a change, it was the opposition on the final tenterhooks as the final quarter was played, with the Town full of con-

LUTON TOWN 1 MANCHESTER UNITED 1

Mark Pembroke and David Preece worked the ball down the left wing, and Preece produced a gem of a teasing, curling cross to the far post. Gary Pallister and Steve Bruce were by-passed, and left back Denis Irwin, the weakest of the United back four in terms of height and weight, was unable to get near the ball as Harford rose majestically above him.

The header hit the bar, but Harford followed up to nod in his 12th First Division goal of the season.

The draw was the least the Town's heroes deserved from a flowing end to end game.

Second best

But United might easily have pulled off a smash and grab raid for all three points, even though they were rarely in command.

They were second best by a long way for

the first 20 minutes, and for that Mr. Pleat praised Chris Kamara in particular for his handling of playmaker Brian McClair.

The visitors were reduced to a succession of back passes at one stage to take the sting out of the game as the Town threatened to run riot.

Inches over

Imre Varadi flashed an early shot inches over the bar after a one-two with Scott Oakes, starting a league game for the first time in over a month.

Pallister stabbed a panicky far post clearance narrowly wide of his own net from a fizzing cross by Pembroke, who met the corner with a thundering drive which hit the top of the bar. It would have been ruled out, however, for offside against other Town men near the goal.

Composure

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Richard Harvey and Harford then worked another opening for Varadi for a shot which was too high, and ever-willing Pembroke missed a couple of half-chances with drives off target.

Good save

Brian Stein, who was sub to make way for the return of Oakes, might have crowned the occasion with a fairy-tale ending.

He replaced Oakes and almost his first taste of the action was to get clear from a neat pass by James.

A dramatic winner was on the cards until Schmeichel pulled off the day's best save to prevent it.

Mr. Ferguson thought United should have held on to their lead, but added: "I was very impressed by Luton."

They deserved the result. I saw them at Manchester City a few weeks ago. They lost, but they showed they could play brilliant football at times."

Mr. Pleat was delighted that the Town's preparation had been vindicated by events, including the recall of Oakes.

Practised

The equaliser came from a move the squad worked on in training, believing that the best way to beat one of the finest defences in the League was to use Preece's accurate crosses to the back post and Harford's power.

And in the second half Chamberlain did a vital job.

The Town had to push

Chance to get out of the last three is blown

AFTER an Easter that began with much promise, Luton Town need a helping hand if their ten years in the First Division is to be continued.

Monday's defeat means that if Coventry take four points from their last two games, at home to West Ham and away to Aston Villa, the Town are down.

If the Town could have held on to their lead at Loftus Road, they would have been out of the bottom three

Fate?

They are beginning to worry at Highfield Road that the fates are conspiring against them.

A week earlier an 88th-minute own goal by Kenny Sansom had sent Coventry to a narrow defeat at Notts County.

And Saturday's home defeat against Everton was another one-goal disaster: the winner by Peter Beagrie was covered by goalkeeper Steve Ogrizovic until it caught a defender's deflection to leave the big goalkeeper helpless.

It was Coventry's fifth successive defeat and by the time they lost again at Leeds on Monday Don Howe was looking at a run of only two wins in 17 games since he replaced Terry Butcher.

But the Sky Blues goal difference, minus

eight compared to the Town's minus 34, is worth a point to them.

Norwich City are still in some danger of being dragged into the dogfight because of a hangover from their FA Cup semi-final defeat against Second Division Sunderland.

They went down to their fourth defeat in a row, at Sheffield Wednesday on Monday after Notts County won 1-0 at Carrow Road on Saturday.

West Ham are just about dead, and will be buried tonight if they fail to beat Manchester United at Upton Park.

But Notts County are battling bravely.

Lift

Two consecutive wins, at home to Coventry and away to Norwich, gave them a lift, and the Town have Sheffield United to thank for an important 3-1 win at Meadow Lane on Monday.

A home win would have shoved the Town down to 21st place.

Instead, if the dream results happen this weekend, we could yet go to Nottingham on Saturday week with the chance of another last-day escape.

The First Division

	HOME					AWAY					
	P	W	D	L	F	P	W	D	L	F	
Leeds	40	12	8	0	37	13	8	8	4	33	22
Man United	39	11	7	2	31	12	9	8	2	29	17
Sheff Wed	40	13	4	3	39	24	8	6	6	22	24
Arsenal	40	11	7	2	46	21	7	7	6	29	18
Man City	40	12	4	4	30	14	6	6	8	24	32
Liverpool	39	12	5	3	32	17	3	9	7	12	22
Sheff Utd	40	9	6	5	27	10	7	10	36	37	57
Nottm Forest	39	10	5	4	34	15	6	4	10	24	28
Aston Villa	40	12	3	5	29	16	4	6	10	17	26
C. Palace	40	7	7	6	23	24	7	7	6	29	35
Chelsea	40	7	6	30	29	6	6	8	18	28	52
Oldham	40	11	5	4	44	31	3	4	13	17	30
Tottenham	40	7	2	11	30	32	8	4	24	25	51
QPR	40	5	10	5	24	21	6	7	22	25	50
Everton	40	7	8	5	26	18	5	5	10	21	29
Wimbledon	40	9	5	6	29	20	3	8	9	20	32
Southampton	40	6	5	9	16	28	7	5	8	21	22
Norwich City	40	8	5	7	28	27	3	6	11	18	34
Coventry	40	5	7	8	17	15	5	4	11	17	27
Luton Town	40	9	7	4	23	17	0	5	15	12	39
Notts Co	40	6	5	9	22	28	3	5	12	16	31
West Ham	39	4	6	9	18	24	3	5	12	15	34



● **MATES:** Welsh internationals Mark Pembroke and Mark Hughes in competition.

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ENTERTAINMENT: Excellent, with the Town close to beating the champions