

Sports News

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Derby1
Luton Town1
(Half-time0-1)

Brian Swain reports

Action pictures: Josh Levy

CAUGHT SHORT AND THE PARTY IS PUT ON HOLD

Match details

Derby Co 1 Luton Town 1

LUTON TOWN: Chamberlain; James, Peake, Dreyer, Johnson; Telfer, Kamara, Preece, Hughes; Dixon, Gray. Subs not used: Oakes, Williams. **DERBY COUNTY:** Taylor; Patterson, Short, Forsyth, Nicholson; Sturridge, Kuhl (Coleman, 29 mins, himself subbed by Stallard, 82 mins); Pembroke, Simpson; Kitson, Gabbiadini.

THE GOALS 0-1 35 mins: David Preece, careful low drive in off the far post after beating the offside trap by timing his run from deep to meet a through pass by Trevor Peake; 1-1, ten seconds before 90 minutes was up, but with five minutes of stoppage time still to come: Craig Short, far post header, after Mark Pembroke drifted clear of Preece and delivered a perfect curling cross.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and three wide; Derby four saved and six wide. **Corners:** 5-5. **REFEREE:** Ian Cruickshanks, Hartlepool. Smallest man on the field, and not up to the job. Very weak with control of pros who seemed to know they could get away more than usual. **BOOKED:** Craig Short for a foul on Phil Gray; Ceri Hughes for a foul on Dean Sturridge.

ATTENDANCE: 13,741, one of Derby's best gates of the season, with 1,027 from Luton packing out the visitors' corner and giving their team great backing, despite being spat on by home fans in the seats above. **ENTERTAINMENT:** Not much of a football match, with Derby playing a lot of goalkeeper's kicks and rush, and offside traps at each end not helping the flow of the game.

Ten seconds

My stopwatch showed ten seconds of normal time to be played when the home side, put together at a cost of around £10million, saved a point through a header by Craig Short.

In fact there were five more minutes to be played, and poor though the ref was, he was right on his timekeeping.

Ian Cruickshanks, a tiny little man, made plenty of mistakes, and unwittingly encouraged, for instance, Marco Gabbiadini, to persist

with crude challenges on Trevor Peake when he found the Luton skipper too dominant to be beaten in any other way. As a spectacle, much of the game was ruined by two offside traps which were a lot smarter than the forwards trying to beat them.

The Town tried to play football, but Derby, with an awful home record this season, tried to placate their critical fans by living up to their Rams nickname.

Their idea of building attacks was all too often

a back pass to goalkeeper Martin Taylor for him to launch 70-yard passes in the direction of the other penalty area.

"I hoped to see more football from Derby," I said to Mark Pembroke after the game. "So did I..." came the honest answer.

In terms of skill, if not brute strength, the Town deserved to pick up their fifth away win of the season.

But it needed David Preece, 30 next month, to suss out a way through

Derby's forward-rushing defence.

He netted his second goal in consecutive games to give the Town the lead after 35 minutes, to take his tally in ten years with the club to 15.

Until then, Derby had been showing some of the long ball game which flourished on the football approach the Town chose.

He fluffed a good chance in the first minute, when the ref hands when the ball was driven at him and hit

DEFENDER ON THE ATTACK: John Dreyer gets upfield to fire in a tremendous left volley from which Martin Taylor made an excellent save.

near the shoulder. Martin Kuhl curled in a free kick to the far post, and Gabbiadini was left unmarked, but his header wide.

Derby's best work came from their left-wingers. Paul Simpson sent a good free kick into the Town's wall, while Alec Chamberlain made a smart diving

With both rearguards getting down well, and back to advance behind the defence, too much of the play was squeezed out of the middle third of the pitch.

It needed a bit of thought to defeat such tactics, and the Town looked more likely, with Chris Kamara going on several good runs from deep, but unable to make them count.

Chamberlain made an important save in a one-on-one with Pembroke after he put him clear. Derby were opting for a long ball game which flourished on the football approach the Town chose.

Derby's substitution had been made six minutes before that, and some of their fans were sure that it was a reason for the side's poor display. They lost

skipper Martin Kuhl

with a muscle strain, and that, they said, robbed them of the one man in midfield capable of holding the ball and spraying out good passes.

Perhaps it was a blow to Derby's players as well, because until their late and undeserved equaliser they looked like a team of misfits, with hardly a footballing idea between them.

But once more, hard though Dixon and Phil Gray worked, the Town attack rarely looked like making the most of the overall superiority of the home side's advancing back four.

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