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Sports News

TOWN MATCH VERDICT

Oxford United.....0
Luton Town 1
(Half-time 0-1)

★★★

Brian Swain reports

Action pictures: John Sherwood

Super-strike earns first away win of the season

A WONDERFUL goal by Ceri Hughes, so fine in its quality, gave Luton Town their first away win of the season and lifted them out of the First Division's relegation places. It taught Oxford the harsh lesson Town have suffered painfully in the past: all the possession in the world is useless if you cannot make the net bulge now and again.

And bulge it did as Hughes wallloped in a 25-yarder against the run of play after 19 minutes.

EBBED

At half-time the odds were still on an Oxford revival, but it turned out they had shot their bolt. The Town improved, and Oxford's confidence ebbed away as they were dumped back on the bottom of the table.

The result was more satisfying than the performance. The Town won through initiative rather than flair.

But it was exactly what was needed after they had been rolled over a few days before at Sunderland.

Oxford contributed to their own downfall largely. In midweek, after a 6-1 thrashing at Sunderland, they opted for a five-man midfield at Nottingham, with only one counter-attacker in front men, and held Forest to a 0-0.

Manager Denis Smith decided to keep the same formation for his home game.

It sounds a little negative, but it seemed worked: in the first half the Town looked very ineffective as an attacking force.

Oxford relied on wide men getting up quickly from midfield to support Alex Dyer in attack, and the Town had to fall back to defend in numbers.

But Trevor Peake and Alan Breacharn were in commanding form, and when they were pulled out of position the home side usually found a string of chances.

A very good one saw Dyer in goal-bound position, but Ceri Hughes kept out a deep cross by Dyer, and when a Breacharn header was way past Martin Hodge the goal was hopelessly wide.

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