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Canaries swoop to savage Town

ON SUNDAY'S sorry evidence at Kenilworth Road, it was difficult to know if Luton Town had played badly, or Norwich City had done exceptionally well in winning the first game of the league season.

Whichever, it was painfully clear that Terry Westley's new-look side was nowhere near the same class as the visitors.

The Canaries sang a sweet song and pounced like Eagles from two corners as the Town made elementary errors.

Without injured defender Steve Davis, and also lacking the major attacking talents of Scott Oakes and Dwight Marshall, the Town stumbled through a miss-match against a side that is trying to bounce back up to the Premiership at the first attempt.

All three Norwich goals were down to the sort of defending you expect to see on the parks on Sunday mornings, but not on a day when professional players are up for the start of a new season.

Long before the end confidence drained from the team faster than the sweat on a hot afternoon when misplaced passes and weak shooting enabled Norwich to cruise home.

Even the bonus of a penalty, expertly converted by Bontcho Guentchev, failed to raise the Town from their lethargy.

It brought their level, but Norwich immediately changed up a gear from their previous cruise control and helped themselves to another goal, and the Town never had any self-belief after that.

The televised game will not have done much to persuade the armchair supporters to come back to Kenilworth Road and enjoy the live action.

Guentchev, with Tony Thorpe and David Oldfield as emergency front men unable to provide a consistent service, will surely appreciate the return of Oakes and Marshall.

Their pace was much missed, and in John Newsome Norwich had the best defender on view. The skipper easily won the man of the match prize, for two classy headed goals and a 90-minute display of commitment and concentration.

No Town player could match it, and at the end we were left to pick out a few half-cheerful consolations.

Top of a short list was the return of Ceri Hughes, in his first league game since a dreadful knee injury received on November 1 last year.

There were flashes of the old swashbuckling determination, and the pity was that others did not show something similar.

First Division debut, but the style and ability to be a major influence on the right of midfield, but spoiled it all with a mistake that

LUTON TOWN 1 NORWICH CITY 3 (Half-time 0-1)

Managers Terry Westley kept faith with his belief in a three-man defence, but they struggled against the pace and power of Ade Akinbiyi, who will trouble players much younger than Trevor Peake.

The skipper kept going doggedly, but Mitchell Thomas suffered an unhappy afternoon.

Only in the first ten minutes did the Town look like making a game of it, but Hughes smashed a 20-yarder narrowly wide, and later chances fell to Garry Waddock, picking up pieces from goalmouth scrambles. But twice he shot weakly at goalkeeper Bryan Gunn.

Norwich served notice of their direct methods when a quick free kick by Mike Milligan went in from the corner while the Town defence, and Akinbiyi, unmarked, looped a header wide.

There was no such luck for the Town from the next set piece. Darren Eadie and Neil Adams worked a short corner routine, Adams crossed, and Newsome rose easily and comfortably to power in his header, with Thomas failing in the attempt to intercept the cross.

Norwich took over after that, with Marvin Johnson showing the only sign of attacking intention with a curling shot which Gunn saved.

Hopes rose in the 53rd minute when Thorpe sent Alexander on a run into the box. Danny Mills, an 18-year-old debutant, foolishly pushed the Town man off the ball, and Guentchev put the penalty into the corner, past Gunn's right hand.

It should have been the springboard for a Town revival. Instead, it served

only to spark Norwich back into form, with another set piece regaining the lead 82 seconds after the penalty hit the net.

From another corner by Adams, Davis decided to take responsibility for attacking the ball, but he flapped and missed, and Newsome headed in off the underside of the bar.

John Taylor, getting over a back injury, was sent on as sub for Thorpe, but by then, with just over a half an hour to go, the Town were already playing as though they expected to be losers.

Norwich were able to sit back and wait for the mistakes, and at times play possession football. With 21 minutes to go the restless muttering among Town fans turned into groans of despair as Alexander tried to work the ball clear from the edge of his own penalty area.

His clearance hit Ashley Ward, who laid the ball off to the right for Adams to blast in a stunning drive. It was a strike to admire, but he will not find many other defences so obliging in setting up chances.

Long before the end of the game Town fans were streaming away from the traditional first-day optimism of 3pm buried by frustration before 5.

The manager thinks we will not see many better teams than Norwich at Kenilworth Road this season. He may be right. I just wonder if Norwich went home thinking they wouldn't see many worse ones.

David Oldfield, back at Luton Town after a break of six years, tries to wriggle through the Norwich defence.



CROWDED OUT: David Oldfield, back at Luton Town after a break of six years, tries to wriggle through the Norwich defence.

Brian Swain on the Town



NUMBER ONE: Bontcho Guentchev strokes home his first Luton Town goal, from a penalty spot (above). BRIEF HAPPINESS: (below) Bontcho Guentchev is buried in the congratulations of his team mates after equalising, 82 seconds before Norwich regained the lead



MATCH DETAILS

TOWN: Kelvin Davis, Thomas, Peake, Marvin Johnson; Alexander, Hughes, Waddock, Harvey; Thorpe (Taylor 57 mins), Oldfield, Guentchev. Unused subs: Steve Davis and goalkeeper Sommer.

NORWICH: Gunn, Mills, Newsome, Prior, Bowen; Adams, Milligan (Sutch, 64 mins, in turn replaced by Polston, 68 mins), Johnson (Ullathorne 64 mins), Eadie, Akinbiyi, Ward.

THE GOALS: 0-1 14 mins: Jon Newsome unmarked to head in from short corner routine and cross by Neil Adams; 1-1 53 mins: Bontcho Guentchev, expert penalty after Danny Mills needlessly pushed Graham Alexander; 1-2 55 mins: Newsome with another free header after Kevin Davis went for a missed corner by Adams; 1-3 69 mins: Neil Adams, tremendous 25-yard thunderbolt, after Alexander gave the ball away on the edge of his own penalty area.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Five saved and one wide: Newsome six saved and eight wide. Cane 9-3 to Norwich.

REFEREE: Mike Portsmouth. Looked all we saw of some of the yellow cards.

BOOKED: Trevor Peake for backing Graham Alexander for lacking a ball away; Ceri Hughes for a foul on Neil Adams; Norwich's John Johnson for a foul on Tony Thorpe and Darren Eadie and John Polston for delaying free kicks.

ATTENDANCE: 7,844. A bad for a match being shown on television, but the lowest opening day gate since 1990. ENTERTAINMENT: Newsome's header, a superb goal, 2,000 Norwich fans loved it. Supporters suffered when the new-look team did well for the first ten minutes, then laid down

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All the Luton Town news

We may have played the best

Barber makes a return

MANAGER Terry Westley consoled himself with the thought that Norwich, who ruined his first game as boss, might turn out to be the best team in the First Division this season.

The depression he felt was apparent on Monday, but he showed little sign of it when he met reporters to conduct Sunday's Press conference with the aplomb of a veteran. And he cheered up when an old hack who reported as David Platt's first game as a manager recalled that the result then was even worse for Luton - 4-0 to Millwall at The Den.

Martin O'Neill, who left Wycombe for Carrow Road after Norwich were relegated at the end of last season, was careful not to be carried away by one result.

He said: "We dominated the game at the end, but that's easy when you are 3-1 up and the other side is chasing the game."

"Obviously we scored our goals at important stages. When it went to 1-1 it could have gone either way, but we got the important second goal."

He agreed that Jon Newsome, the central defender who went up to score twice from set pieces, had played brilliantly, and he had no complaints about the penalty awarded to the Town.

"It was a daft penalty," said the Norwich boss. "Mills is only 18, and was a bit naive. He pushed the Luton player, but didn't need to."

Norwich fans are already dreaming of a rapid return to the Premiership, but O'Neill said: "This was a great

WHAT THEY SAID

start to the season, but it is going to be a hard league, and it will be difficult to get out of it."

He said he admired some of Luton's passing football, and added: "At times they outnumbered us in midfield. But I was pleased with the way we played it out wide, to Adams and Eadie."

"But this was just one game. It's nothing to be carried away with. There are a lot more to come."

Westley took a similar view to hide his disappointment, but said he had already decided to make team changes for last night's Coca Cola Cup clash with Bournemouth.

"We wouldn't have started with that eleven if everyone had been fit," he said. "But the result was caused by our lack of ability to mark players at set pieces."

"At 1-1 I thought we had got the game. But within two minutes we gave away another goal. Newsome had two free headers, and it was down to poor marking. We're too soft, and we caved in. It was a poor show in the end for our supporters."

"With 15 minutes to go our players didn't think they were going to get anything out of the game. They didn't roll up their sleeves and try to do something about it. Once the third goal went in there was a lack of belief that they could do it."

"I thought Graham Alexander had a fair debut, and it was good to have Ceri Hughes back. He did some good things."

"And I think we may have played the best team in the league today."



HAPPY HARRY: The Town unveiled their new mascot on the first day of the season, but it wasn't long before fans were wondering what he had to smile about

Rovers ready to make village soccer history

APART from their visit to Wembley in the FA Vase final in 1978, Barton Rovers will celebrate the biggest event in the club's history on Saturday when they make their debut in Division One of the IHS League.

Runners-up in Division Two last season the Rovers entertain Bognor Regis Town in a match which will be a confidence gained from an unbeaten run in their series of pre-season friendly matches.

They came through four games without being beaten, ending with a draw at Wootton Bassett where Gez Warner scored the Barton goal, and a draw with Brache Sparta on Saturday.

At Foxfield Barton went two goals up through Tony Hamilton, their new striker from Hemel Hempstead and an old goal-ace Richard Camp.

But in the second half the South Midlands side came back to equalise.

Bognor Regis just avoided relegation from Division One last season and the Rovers are hoping to get away to a flying start in their new level.

Boosting the remainder of last season's promotion winning side on Saturday will be new boys Hamilton, Nigel Reed and Rob Sutton from Leigh Town, former Barton striker Bobby Smith, who has returned to Sharpenhoe Road after spells with Newport Pagnell and Dunstable, and Tony Flanagan from Hemel Hempstead.

Saturday's opening game of the season at Sharpenhoe Road starts at 5pm.

BRACHE 2 BARTON 2

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OUTGUNNED: Bontcho Guentchev loses a two-against-one confrontation, with Bryan Gunn saving at his feet.



Luton Town's Community Corner

Exclusive - A weekly report by Luton Town Football in the Community Officer, Colwyn Rowe pictured above.

IT HAS been a busy summer behind the scenes at Kenilworth Road, and perhaps the most important item for young Town fans is the appointment of a full-time Junior Hatters co-ordinator.

Sam Walsh will be on permanent duty in my office, and her appointment has enabled us to relaunch the Junior Hatters. She was at our first induction evening, when Ceri Hughes met the Junior Hatters on a very enjoyable occasion.

It's worth joining: all members will receive free Luton Town baseball caps, and will be invited to our successful Saturday Morning Club. We will also have a new "fun hour" on Thursday evenings, which Town players will attend regularly.

Another first will be that five lucky youngsters will have the chance of being the mascot, or ball-boys or girls at First Division matches.

Our holiday coaching courses have been an outstanding success, with all taking part getting the chance to attend a league match free of charge. Town players have attended the courses throughout the home counties, meeting boys and

girls between five and 14 years of age.

To start the new season we are running a two-day course at Luton Rugby Club on Thursday August 31 and Friday September 1, from 10 am to 2pm each day. A free league match ticket will be given to everyone taking part and the cost is £10, or £6 for Junior Hatters.

Finally, don't forget to attend our home game with Leicester City on Saturday week, and meet our new mascot, Harry the Hatter. And if you the community matter, give me a ring on Luton 411622.

Colwyn Rowe.

A SUB was subbed by Norwich when Martin O'Neill was glad he made use of a new regulation about men on the bench. No longer is it necessary to have a goalkeeper as one of the three subs, and O'Neill opted for three outfield men.

After 64 minutes Norwich made a double substitution, with midfielder Daryl Sutch replacing Mike Milligan and

Robert Ullathorne taking over from Andy Johnson.

Within four minutes Sutch had to leave the field to treat cut eyebrows stitched after a clash of heads, and was subbed, by defender Polston.

The Town had stuck with traditional subs bench players, including goalkeeper Sommer.

Totternhoe warm up

TOTTENHOE drew with Bournemouth Athletic from the Premier Division of the South Midlands League in the last of their friendlies, holding them to 1-1.

They are now ready for the new season which begins on Saturday with a visit to Bedford United.

Next Tuesday they have their first home game when they take on Tring 6.30.

On Saturday Totternhoe took the lead when Mark Thomas struck from close range from a cross by Nigel Cave.

Cave was outstanding for Totternhoe, along with Wayne Lythgo.

Buckingham equalised from an excellent cross from the experienced Tippy Shivers who was their man of the match.