

A few home truths bring Albion right result

Luton Town 1 West Bromwich Albion 2 45/96

By ADRIAN MILLEDGE

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Quantity at Kenilworth Road on Saturday certainly did not equate with quality.

For a start, Albion's much vaunted five-man midfield looked as devoid of creativity as it had been full of it against Foggia and Reading.

And as for Warwick referee Graham Barber's tally of eight bookings: let's just say the man could be described as aptly named.

His use of the yellow card brought to mind the most pernicky of a character totally unable to leave even the smallest blemish at peace.

All of which made for a game of such tedium that party political broadcasts offer white knuckle excitement in comparison.

That is until Albion finally rediscovered the form that has made them one of the First Division's most watchable and effective sides.

It took them at least an hour, however, and corresponded with the introduction of Andy Hunt for Dave Gilbert.

Prior to that, Albion, as manager Alan Buckley admitted, had not so much been unimpressive as almost anonymous.

"We didn't compete in the first half, full stop," Buckley said. "As a result we had a very busy half-time when a few home truths were delivered.

"But even then we didn't start that well in the second half."

Quite so. The game was three-quarters run when Albion first troubled home goalkeeper Ian Feuer. And that speaks volumes for both the standard of the visitors' marksmanship and their approach work.

For the six foot four inches tall Feuer, sporting a day-glo green jersey and looking like a vertically unchallenged version of Kermit the Frog, was a pretty unmissable target.

But until Stacy Coldicott forced him to make a scrambled save in the 71st minute it was Albion (and of course referee

Barber) who warranted the description of Muppets.

There was an element of controversy about that save — some Albion players, plus most of the stand-full of away fans behind Feuer's goal, believing the ball had crossed the line.

It did so, though, two minutes later when Lee Ashcroft headed home Kevin Donovan's right-wing cross to cancel out Graham Alexander's first-half strike for Luton.

Albion's winner ten minutes later was also a product of a cross from Donovan on the right.

This time the Luton defence, expecting another chip, were fooled by the low cross and Julian James miscued a clearance which rebounded off Hunt and into the net.

It was a fortuitous way to win but at least it rewarded the enterprise Albion had shown once Buckley reverted to a more familiar 4-4-2 formation.

"The five-man midfield never got to grips with things," Buckley admitted.

"But once we went back to our normal system we played some good stuff."

Indeed, they did but Albion owed their victory as much to goalkeeper Stuart

Naylor as any tactical change. Naylor, who finger-tipped over a powerful shot from Alexander in the first half bettered that not once but twice after the interval.

Firstly, he got the better of the advancing David Oldfield to keep the deficit to one goal and then, diving to his right, saved Steve Davis' 77th-minute penalty which followed Paul Mardon's foul on Dwight Marshall.

Suitably inspired, Albion went on to clinch a win that means nosebleed time at The Hawthorns.

Buckley's team, thanks to the three points, are now third in the Division One table.

If they can continue to snatch wins from such below-par displays, then remaining there is not such a fanciful dream.

Scorers: Harvey (19) 1-0, Ashcroft (73) 1-1, Hunt (83) 1-2.
LUTON TOWN (3-4-1-2): Feuer; Peake (James, 46), Davis, Johnson; Alexander, Waddock, Hughes, Harvey; Oldfield; Marshall, Woodford. Suba (not used): Guentchev, McLaren.
WEST BROMWICH ALBION (4-5-1): Naylor; Burgess, Mardon, Raven, Agnew (Smith, 66); Ashcroft, Donovan, Coldicott, Cunningham, Gilbert (Hunt, 66); Taylor. Sub (not used): Reece.
Referee: G Barber (Warwick).

Bookings: Luton Town - Harvey and Alexander (both fouls), Feuer (ungentlemanly conduct), Davis (dissent); West Bromwich Albion - Mardon, Raven and Cunningham (fouls), Taylor (ungentlemanly conduct).

Attendance: 8,042.
Man of the match: Stuart Naylor - key saves did much to ensure his side's victory.