

ROYALS RATINGS

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Astres Trophy
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Forster: lively
debut

PERFORMANCE

Howie:	6
Gray:	7
Hunter:	7
Casper:	7
Caskey:	7
McIntyre:	5
Grant:	7
Scott:	6
Williams:	7
Gurney:	6
Smith:	6
Sub:	
Forster:	8

ENTERTAINMENT

Reading:	6
Luton:	6

MATCH FACTS

Attempts on target

Reading:	5
Luton:	7

Attempts off target

Reading:	5
Luton:	7

Corners

Reading:	9
Luton:	5

Free kicks conceded

Reading:	13
Luton:	11

Caught offside

Reading:	9
Luton:	7

Sent off/Booked

Reading:	0/2
Luton:	0/2

NEXT MATCH

Away to
Peterborough
on Tuesday
(7.45pm)

Nick Ive
awards
marks
out of 10



Newboys can't stop Burns' men from Forster shines



► **CONGRATULATIONS** – Martin Williams is swamped by his team-mates after grabbing Reading's equaliser (top)

Pictures: EDDIE GREVILLE (ref: 3117/99)

► **NEW BOY** – Neil Smith leads the charge as Luton's Matthew Spring gives chase

slumping to first home defeat of the season 99/00 but Royals let it slip

SLOPPY defending again proved costly as Royals were left empty handed for the second successive week.

Not even the arrival of Nicky Forster, Peter Grant and Neil Smith were able to inspire their team-mates to a share of the spoils.

Reading are already falling behind Division 2's early pace-setters after two just one victory in their opening three league games. Tommy Burns's men deserved to take at least a point from the game, but until they find the net regularly and start concentrating for 90 minutes then there will always be a danger they will throw valuable points away.

Burns gave a debut to £650,000 summer signing Forster, after the striker returned from an Achilles injury. And the former England under-21 ace showed he may be the player to kick-start Reading's season. Forster was introduced into the action after 54 minutes and he unsettled Luton's defence a couple of times with his pace and willingness to run at the opposition.

The former Birmingham striker said: "My main asset is obviously my pace when running at defenders. And when I got the ball to my feet I was able to do that. I made a couple of chances when I got it to feet which I was pleased about.

"I had one shot which was a bit wayward and another one where the keeper smothered it although I thought it might have squirmed under him.

"But it's good to be back playing and all I need now is to get a few games under my belt."

Boosted by the inclusion of Smith and Grant in midfield, Reading looked a lot more solid than the previous week against Cambridge.

And the experience of Grant, a free transfer from Norwich, and the bite of Smith seemed to settle Royals as they made a lively start.

Smith took up a position alongside Darren Caskey with Grant playing a holding role as Burns continued with a 4-3-3 formation.

Jimmy McIntyre had the first effort on goal but his header from 12 yards flew wide after a teasing cross from Caskey.

And it was Caskey who had Reading's first effort on goal after eight minutes when his shot from the edge of the box was easily held by Luton keeper Nathan Abbey.

It was a lively start by the home side but despite lots of possession they found it hard to penetrate Luton Town's well organised back five.

And against the run of play it was the Hatters who nearly took the lead when Matthew Taylor's free kick was pushed over the bar by Scott Howie.

Luton had a second chance minutes later when Andrew Fortiadis skipped past Stuart Gray down Reading's left and found Phil Gray on the edge of the box.

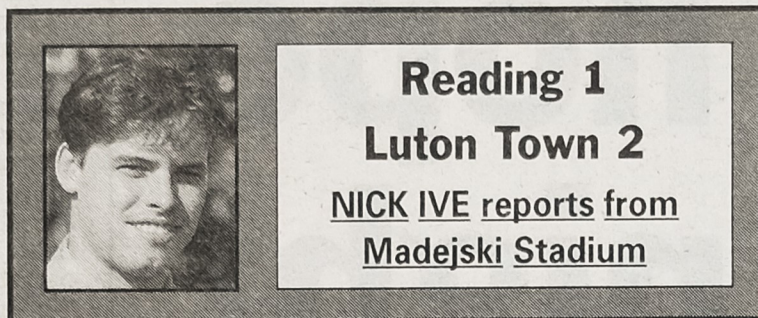
But his effort lacked any real punch and Howie was able to make a comfortable save down to his left.

Reading responded with a couple of slick moves and Smith, a £100,000 midweek signing from Fulham, nearly capped his debut with a goal after 33 minutes.

Grant picked out McIntyre down the right flank with a superb ball.

And McIntyre's cross came out to Smith on the edge of the box. But the midfielder's volley went wide of the post.

It came in the middle of a good spell for the home side but they were unable to turn



**Reading 1
Luton Town 2**
**NICK IVE reports from
Madejski Stadium**

their dominance into goals as Gray had a double effort blocked and Martin Williams was thwarted by Abbey, who looked to have handled outside the box on the stroke of half-time when he shut down the former Luton man.

So it was a big blow to Burns's men when Luton took the lead nine minutes after the restart.

Matthew Taylor picked out Phil Gray on the right wing and his cross was whipped in to **FOTIADIS**, who got in front of Barry Hunter and headed past Howie from six yards.

It signalled the introduction of Forster who came on for McIntyre, and his presence seemed to lift the crowd and his team-mates as Royals drew level within two minutes.

Andy Gurney whipped in a centre from deep inside the Luton half and Keith Scott's knockdown was stabbed home by **WILLIAMS** from seven yards out for his first strike of the season.

And the Reading fans were treated to their first glimpse of Forster's pace soon afterwards when he set off on a 40-yard run.

Forster picked the ball up close to the halfway line on the right flank, skipped past Marvin Johnson and powered into the box. But the former Brentford man drove his shot high and wide.

It was a positive run by Forster who popped up on the opposite side minutes later.

Shrugging off two challenges, he played a one-two with Caskey but watched as Abbey saved his shot on the line.

Forster looked the most likely to grab a winner, but against the run of play Luton dealt the home side a killer blow with five minutes remaining.

Reading gave away a needless throw-in when Chris Casper, who had a solid game at the back, put

Gurney under trouble with a ball out to the wing.

Gurney was unable to keep the ball in play and Taylor's quick throw found substitute Michael McIndoe, whose cross from the left was turned home by **LIAM GEORGE**.

Scott had a chance to salvage a deserved point in the last minute but his brave diving header flew inches wide of the post.

Forster was disappointed not to start his Royals career with a win and admitted Reading can't afford to be dropping points at home like that.

"It's good to be back playing," said Forster. "But it's disappointing because of the fact we lost.

"If we are looking for promotion we've got to be winning all our home games and get draws and the odd wins away from home.

"We're all disappointed and we've got to try to address the problem and start getting some victories."

Luton Town manager Lennie Lawrence admitted his side were lucky to escape with all three points.

"I think we've got to be realistic and say a draw would have been a fair result," conceded the Hatters boss.

"We didn't have as many shots on targets or as much possession so maybe Reading can feel a bit hard done by not to get anything from the game."

But Lawrence believes

Burns' suicide squad

From Back Page

and I want to make a success of it. And I think we can. I know Tommy well and I know his passion and desire to win things.

"That's one of the main reasons I came here.

"I had offers from other clubs in higher divisions including a club from the Scottish Premier Division.

"But this is challenge I decided to take and I want to try and make Reading successful and get them up to where they deserve to be."



► **SPRING IN HIS STEP** – Andy Gurney loses out to Luton Town's midfielder Matthew Spring

ref: (E3117/99)



FAN'S VERDICT

THIS is the first time I've seen Reading this season, and I have to say it was a rather poor performance.

The team seem to lack any real threat going forward and Stuart Gray's lack of pace at the back is a great worry, although having said that he works hard and gets involved in the game a lot.

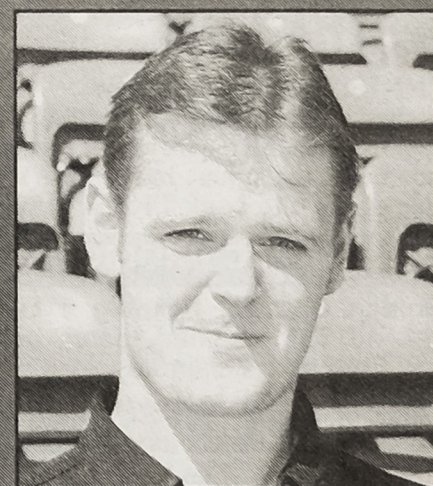
The one defender I was particularly pleased with was Chris Casper. His reading of the game was faultless and he also made some timely interceptions.

It was my first visit to Madejski Stadium, and on the basis of Saturday's performance, I can't see me going back for a while.

My friend and I were tempted to leave at half-time but we decided to stay.

Things improved in the second half after the introduction of Nicky Forster.

It was his first game, and despite not being match fit, he



**by Vince McGrath
of Reading**

looked very lively and was always willing to take on defenders.

Every time he got the ball it lifted the crowd and he was unlucky not to grab an opener after some good work down the left with Darren Caskey.

But until Reading can find a regular goalscorer and stop these silly lapses at the back then they will not be at the top challenging for honours.

**Star man: Nicky Forster
Value for money: 6**