

LATE GOALS IN GREAT ESCAPE

MAGICIAN David Blaine could not have produced a better escape act than Plymouth Argyle's yesterday to clinch victory over bitter rivals Luton with two late goals.

David Friio's headed winner in the 89th minute came after leading scorer Mickey Evans equalised six minutes previously.

After scoring 10 goals in their previous four games, Argyle's steady stream of goals looked to have dried up in the sun until Evans capped an impressive display with an equaliser.

In-form Evans took his account this season to four goals with a looping header after meeting Dave Worrell's right-wing cross.

But Argyle's amazing comeback was not over. First, captain Paul Wotton's power-driver from outside the area was tipped over by Luton 'keeper Rob Beckwith.

Wotton then played a major role in the winner when he sent his free-kick to the back post where Friio directed his header past Beckwith.

Evans's goal came as a mighty relief for Argyle fans after Gary McSheffrey had put the Hatters ahead on 57 minutes.

▼ ARGYLE 2 LUTON TOWN 1 by Nick Parkinson

It would have been a hard defeat to stomach for Argyle fans considering the rivalry between the two clubs in recent years after the Pilgrims beat Luton to win the Third Division title two seasons ago.

And victory sent the Pilgrims into a familiar position in the League table – ahead of Luton. As Argyle had not lost at Home Park since March, they had reason to be hopeful of getting one over on Luton.

But the shock absence of French goalkeeper Romain Larrieu from the starting line-up with a knee ligament injury was a serious blow to Argyle's hopes. Argyle boss Paul Sturrock had kept Larrieu's injury – sustained in last Saturday's game and which could rule him out for months – a secret until the teams were announced as he tried to bring in a replacement on loan last week.

Sturrock was not able to sign a replacement in time for yesterday but hopes to bring in someone on loan tomorrow, with former Burnley



▲ PAIN BEFORE THE GAIN: Argyle match winner David Friio suffered an early injury

Picture: Tony Carney

'keeper Marlon Beresford one possibility. Instead, 20-year-old Luke McCormick started his first game for nearly a year between the posts for Argyle.

And the young 'keeper was indebted to one of his centre backs in the first two minutes.

Luton quickly set up camp in the Argyle box and,

after forcing a second corner, Graham Coughlan was needed to clear Sol Davis' header off the line and then block Matt Spring's follow-up.

Rather than Argyle goal attempts, it was Luton trialist Enoch Showunmi who was responsible for stirring the home fans the most after committing a series of

clumsy tackles. He was finally booked on 26 minutes, but he continued to get into trouble with a card-happy referee until being substituted on 40 minutes.

The Hatters started the second period in positive fashion.

McSheffrey latched onto Ian Hillier's pass into the area and his sublime turn

took him past Coughlan, but the Luton striker's shot from 10 yards sailed over.

However, the diminutive striker was deadly accurate on 57 minutes. Kevin Foley swung over a cross from the right wing and McSheffrey met it at the near post with a header that arrowed high into the opposite corner of McCormick's goal.

Evans has goal-den touch

MICKEY Evans reckons Plymouth Argyle's recent goal rush is proof the Pilgrims do not miss a 20-goals-a-season hitman.

The Plymouth-born striker has thrived in Argyle's appetite for attacking football so far this season.

Evans, 30, has scored four goals in eight games after claiming a brace in Argyle's 3-1 win at Brentford last weekend and a headed equaliser in yesterday's 2-1 win over Luton.

No other professional football team in the country has created more goalscoring chances than Paul Sturrock's side, according to statistics released last week.

The Pilgrims create more than 25 chances per game – which is more than double that of their Second Division rivals – and have hit the back of the net 15 times in seven League games this season.

And before yesterday's late win over Luton, Ar-

▼ by Nick Parkinson

gyle had scored three times in three of their last four games.

Such evidence has convinced Evans that Argyle do not need to sign a striker with a record of bagging at least 20 goals a season since all areas of the squad are capable of finding the target.

Some fans were calling for the Pilgrims to sign a goal machine last season, but Evans believes it would be a risk.

'Me and Ian Stonebridge have got a few recently but the goals come from the whole side,' he said.

'Everyone has chipped in with the goals and that's the difference between us and the others.'

'We don't need a 20 or more goals a season man because we've got a number of people in the squad who chip in. It's better that way because you get injuries and what happens if you lose that 20-goals-a-season man to injury?

You cannot rely on just one player – it's a team effort and it's working for us at the moment.'

And Evans knows he must ensure it keeps working – or face losing his place in the team.

He had to settle for the substitutes' bench earlier in the campaign but injuries to Marino Keith and Nathan Lowndes have seen him start in attack alongside Ian Stonebridge for the last three games.

To avoid being dropped from manager Sturrock's starting line-up, Evans admits he needs to keep impressing.

'I'm going to have to score goals or play really well to stay in the team at the moment,' said Evans, from St Budeaux.

'Hopefully, I can try and do both. If I can score more goals then brilliant, but I want to play well also. There's a lot more to my game than scoring goals, otherwise I wouldn't be in the team.'

'The partnership is working well with Ian, as it

is with Marino. In training, we have been working on Ian getting around me on the end of balls to the box. He gets on the end of a lot of my knockdowns.'

'We have been working a lot on knockdowns – and it seems to work.'

Evans insists this is the best squad at Home Park since he arrived back at the club in March 2001 after leaving in 1997 for spells at Blackburn, West Brom, Southampton and Bristol Rovers.

'Competition for places up front is good for the team and this is the strongest squad – despite it being smaller this season – since I have been here,' he said.

Evans, who signed a two-year contract in May, will fancy his chances of adding to his goal account in Tuesday's trip to Peterborough. Argyle inflicted a thrashing last season but Evans warned: 'We beat Peterborough 6-1 at home last season so they will want to get back us for that.'



▲ GOAL ACE: Argyle striker Michael Evans on the ball at Home Park yesterday

Picture: Tony Carney

argyleVERDICT

starRATINGS

McCormick	7
Worrell	7
Wotton	7
Coughlan	7
Gilbert	6
Norris	6
Adams	6
Friio	7
Hodges	6
Stonebridge	6
Evans	8

SUBS: Keith (for Stonebridge, 60); Bent (for Adams, 69); Sturrock (for Gilbert, 69); Not used: Capaldi, Beresford.

LUTON: Beckwith, Foley, Spring, Hughes, Brkovic, Coyne, Boyce, Bayliss (Hillier, 45), Davis, McSheffrey, Showunmi (Crow, 40). Subs not used: Brill, Mansell, Leary.

SCORERS: Argyle – Evans, 83; Friio, 89. Luton – McSheffrey, 57.

YELLOW CARDS: Argyle – Coughlan, 3; Wotton, 85; Luton – Coyne, 15; Showunmi, 26; Beckwith 32.

REFEREE: A Bates (Staffordshire) 5

ATTENDANCE: 9,894.

manoftheMATCH

Mickey **EVANS**

another impressive display of leading the line and a well-taken goal

viewfromtheDUGOUT

PAUL Sturrock said: 'We were lucky to get anything out of the game and I'm obviously very pleased with the win, but I'm a bit disappointed with the performance because we looked very leggy.'

'I didn't think we were going to come back from 1-0 down and it was a poor game. There was no cohesion from either team.'

'We seemed to lose all our ideas about passing the ball. We just started punting the ball up to Mickey Evans and just ended up with scraps had no shape to our play and just lived off scraps.'

'Ironically in the end our goals came from scraps. I'm very disappointed. The players said they were out on their feet.'

'I'm treating it as a defeat instead of climbing a few places in the league.'

'If we keep playing like that we will not continue winning games. They just looked a sharper team than us for 90 minutes.'

fansVIEWPOINT

STEVE Nicholson writes:-

I don't know about anyone else but these late goal feasts are doing me in! Two in the last 10 mins saved a point against Brighton, this repeat won all three.

In truth a win was more than Argyle deserved. A real lacklustre team performance crying out for some width was worth no more than a draw. I have seen us play far better and lose, so I'm not complaining.

The first half was completely ruined by one of the worst refereeing displays I have ever seen. Showunmi should have been sent off on two separate occasions.

Judge should also have been red carded for deliberate handling outside the area. Both stayed on and for much of the game Luton were on top.

Argyle's late show came courtesy of headers from Evans and Friio from the only two decent quality crosses we made all day.

Man of the Match: Ian Stonebridge – best of a pretty poor bunch.

comingUP

TUESDAY: Nationwide League, Division Two – Peterborough (away, 7.45pm)

SATURDAY: Nationwide League, Division Two – Wrexham (away, 3pm).