

TOWN ESCAPE

03/04



■ Nice one, son. . . Tommy Mooney and Matt Hewlett congratulate James Milner after his opening goal last night
Ref: 26944-8

King's men pinch draw as referee evokes fury

ATROCIOUS, abysmal, Astonishing, extraordinary and unbelievable – the only words fit to describe the performance of referee Paul Danson as Town struck in the nick of time to extend their unbeaten league run to 10 games.

The majority of fans leaving the County Ground preferred to make use of more colourful Anglo-Saxon phrases to sum up the official's evening and their anger was completely justified.

Brian Howard rescued a point for Town with an 89th-minute strike, and it was hard not to laugh as Mr Danson acknowledged the youngster's first senior goal with a booking – for excessive celebrating.

Howard would probably have felt left out had he not been cautioned as it seemed everyone else on the pitch had either been booked or dismissed by that stage – including Luton boss Mike Newell.

Football is supposed to be entertainment and supporters pay to watch the players not the officials.

At least a healthy crowd of more than 7,500 could not complain about a lack of talking points – two red cards, three including Newell's banishment to the stands, and even a 'fashionable' penalty re-take.

The match was supposed to be a 'farewell' for James Milner and Jerel Ifil but sadly they found themselves overshadowed by Mr Danson.

Manager King had hoped Milner could say goodbye with a goal and his wish came true after just seven minutes.

Sammy Igoe raced down the left, cut back inside and lofted a beautiful cross into the box for the Leeds youngster to get in front of keeper Rob Beckwith and head home from 10 yards.

Mr Danson's first controversial decision of the night came on 10 minutes when Gary McSheffrey went down under a challenge from Ifil, only for the referee to book the Luton player for diving rather than award a penalty.

Courtney Pitt whistled a 30 yard free-kick over the crossbar on 20 minutes but the next action came off the field as Luton boss Newell was dismissed for something he said.

Keeper Beckwith was almost left with egg on his face mo-



TOWN 2 LUTON 2
by chief sports writer
JON RITSON
jritson@newswilts.co.uk

ments later as his attempted clearance clattered against the Leeds man and out behind.

Emmerson Boyce then stuck out a long leg to thwart Milner on the edge of the area while a slip by former Town defender Sol Davis allowed Igoe to sprint clear on the right.

He cut inside but rather than choosing to shoot, played it across goal where Milner and Mooney both left it for each other.

Boyce rifled a shot into the arms of Evans on 41 minutes while Ifil was well placed at the other end to block a drive from Adrian Forbes.

If there was a plot in his dressing room, Mr Danson appeared to lose it at half-time.

With the second period just 40 seconds old Town found themselves down to 10 men.

Stefani Miglioranzi, cautioned in the first half, found himself heading for an early bath after committing the dreadful crime of juggling the ball once on his foot after a free-kick had been awarded to Luton.

Cue disbelief all around the ground as Town suddenly faced an uphill struggle.

Evans flew to his right superbly to tip away a drive from Forbes and McSheffrey dragged a shot wide before parity in numbers was restored on 53 minutes as Luton's Davis saw red for connecting with Milner near the right corner flag.

McSheffrey was then at the centre of an incident which saw the visitors level matters on 64 minutes.

He collapsed under a challenge from Viveash but Evans made a fine save to his left to preserve the lead.

At least that's what everyone, apart from Mr Danson, thought.

He ordered a retake, despite Evans' protests that he hadn't moved off his line before the ball was struck.

He was promptly booked and his mood was hardly helped by the fact that McSheffrey found the bottom left corner with his second attempt.

If that was bad enough, worse was to follow as Forbes was given far too much time and space on the right edge of the area, wriggled inside and bent a great strike into the bottom left corner of the net.

Matty Heywood found the net with a header on 69 minutes only for it to be ruled out for a mystery foul.

As the clock ticked on, Milner looked odds-on to equalise on 75 minutes as he sprinted forward, coolly rounded Beckwith but his shot from the left was scrambled off the line by Luton captain Chris Coyne.

The equaliser finally materialised with 60 seconds remaining.

Howard was fouled on the left edge of the area by Perrett and the England Under 20 international lashed home a terrific strike through a crowd of bodies after Gurney's free-kick had only been half cleared.



■ The save that wasn't. . . Rhys Evans gets down to stop Gary McSheffrey's first penalty attempt. Ordered to be re-taken, McSheffrey levelled with his second
Ref: 26944-68

FRIGHT NIGHT



■ Off night . . . former Town man Sol Davis (far left) finds himself the third man to be sent off by referee Paul Danson
Pictures: DAVE EVANS Ref: 26944-58

Bitter-sweet for Brian!

BRIAN Howard's first-ever goal in senior football may have preserved Swindon Town's unbeaten run of 10 league games, but he did not escape the yellow card confetti.

The 20-year-old struck in the 89th minute and amid the red and yellow card bonanza on the night, Howard collected a booking from referee Paul Danson for his over-exuberant celebrations.

Said Howard: "I thought it was a bit harsh really.

"It was my first career goal and I couldn't have picked a better time to score, to maintain our unbeaten run.

"As it was my first senior goal, and after all the earlier controversy, I was delighted and wanted to share that with the fans. They have been brilliant all season and were right behind us again on the night.

"I jumped towards the fans, but not into the crowd. To be quite honest, I can't quite remember."

Howard was one of three Town substitutions on the night and the England Under 20 international was thrilled to play an important part in maintaining the side's early momentum.

"I've been disappointed not to have been starting," he said. "But then you can't change a side that's doing well and I've just got to make sure that I impress when I do get my chance.

"We've got two loan players going back now – James Milner and Jerel Ifil – and suspensions will start kicking in, so chances will come. We've had a good



■ Goal-den boy . . . Brian Howard celebrates Ref: 29644-146

start, but it's a long, long season and that's when the strength of the squad will tell."

Milner and Ifil, meanwhile, were just glad to end their respective spells in Wiltshire having not tasted defeat.

Milner said: "I was pleased to get a goal and we've managed to grind out a result.

"I want to wish the club all the

best for the future and hope they can go on to get promotion.

"I haven't seen a better team than Swindon. There are some fantastic players and they get it down and play which is important."

And Ifil added: "It's been great to get first team football. There is a lot of confidence in the squad and hopefully the results will carry on coming."

MATCH FACTS

SWINDON TOWN 2

Milner, 7, Howard, 89

LUTON TOWN 2

McSheffrey (pen), 64, Forbes, 66

Wednesday, October 1, 2003

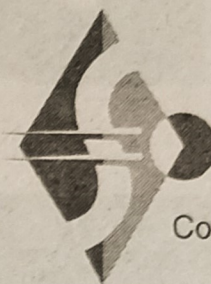
Pitch: Excellent. Weather: Cool
Attendance: 7,573

TOWN BOOKINGS: Miglioranzi (s/o), Mooney, Viveash, Evans, Howard.

LUTON BOOKINGS: McSheffrey, Hughes, Perrett, Davis (s/o).

PLAYER RATINGS

10 – SENSATIONAL; 9 – OUTSTANDING;
8 – VERY GOOD; 7 – GOOD;
6 – ABOVE AVERAGE; 5 – SATISFACTORY;
4 – BELOW PAR; 3 – POOR;
2 – VERY POOR 1 – SHOCKING



SWINDON TOWN

ANDY KING: Saw his side grab a late draw after the man in black dominated the drama at the County Ground. Can take pride in a 10-match unbeaten run.

20 – RHYS EVANS: A couple of smart stops and a great penalty save – at least it should have been! (7)

5 – ADI VIVEASH: Another solid display at the back and really got stuck in where it hurts. Used the ball well. (7)

19 – MATTY HEYWOOD: Saw a header ruled out, strong in the air at the back and little to complain about. (7)

2 – JEREL IFIL: Another good display and he will be missed. Worked hard to rectify his occasional errors. (7)

11 – DAVID DUKE: Back in the starting line-up and produced another energetic display. (6)

10 – STEFANI MIGLIORANZI: Was the victim of an absolutely outrageous dismissal. (6)

4 – MATTY HEWLETT: A good performance in the centre of the park, especially in the first half. (7)

6 – ANDY GURNEY: Not the best of starts to the game but recovered well and set up the late equaliser. (6)

7 – SAMMY IGOE: Provided the cross for Milner's opener and a threat to Luton's defence throughout. (7)

8 – TOMMY MOONEY: Worked hard for 90 minutes and held the ball up superbly as ever. Missed his strike partner. (6)

STAR MAN: 16: JAMES MILNER

Said 'goodbye' with a goal, should have netted two and lively throughout.



(7)

TOWN SUBSTITUTES: Howard (Igoe) 79 minutes. Robinson (Hewlett) 79 mins. Reeves (Duke) 80 mins.

LUTON TOWN

Beckwith, Foley, Coyne, Boyce, Davis, Hughes, Pitt, McSheffrey, Perrett, Forbes (Leary), Robinson.

REFEREE: PAUL DANSON

Not enough space to do justice to the official's performance. You simply had to be there. Astonishing.