

Bell's late goal rings in change of fortune

LUTON TOWN FC

LEAGUE ONE

LUTON 2

Furlong 30, Bell 86

PORT VALE 1

Rodgers 90

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AFTER three straight defeats Luton Town got their season back on track with a much needed victory.

They may have stopped the rot and a win's a win but Kevin Blackwell's men made hard work of ten-man Port Vale.

Paul Furlong's fifth goal of the campaign set Luton on their way before Vale defender Ashley Westwood saw red for abusing the referee just before half time.

For all Hatters' domination they struggled to kill the game off and had to wait until four minutes from time for David Bell's thunderous strike from outside the box.

Even then the job wasn't done as Luton conceded an almost obligatory late goal when Luke Rodgers made sure the match had a nervy ending.

"With the possession and chances we had there should have been more goals," agreed Blackwell. "You always make it an uncomfortable finish when they score a late goal. Some of the football was first class yet we're still disappointed with our overall performance".

"We talked to the players at half time as to whether they think it's too easy because we're taking teams apart first half. The game should have been over by half time.

"You can't please all of the people all of the time. They've got to accept that I'm changing this football club from top to bottom. It takes time for things to settle down. But I don't think anyone can complain with some of the football we've been playing. Bear in mind I've only been in charge of 20 games at Luton Town. There's a long way to go yet.

"We're playing good football. What we need to do is make sure that's not for 45 or 50 minutes but for 90."

Despite last weekend's defeat at Tranmere, Blackwell stuck with the same side and the same formation with Furlong deployed as a lone striker.

Wingers Bell and Dean Morgan were expected to break down a stubborn Port Vale side that had clearly come for a draw. Martin Foyle's team were playing for time from the kick off.

Hatters were on top from the outset and there was a running theme to all Luton's attacks in the first half Bell and set pieces.

It started in the second minute when from his corner Alan Goodall's downward header cannoned off the cross bar. As the left back fell to the floor he also connected with the rebound but it went straight at the



Steve Robinson gets in a towering header in yesterday's welcome 2-1 win over Port Vale

relieved Joe Anyon in the Valiants' goal.

Bell was provider for two David Edwards chances – first a drilled free kick that the Welshman flicked inches over with a header and then with an in swinging corner that Edwards again nodded past the bar.

So it was no surprise that when Hatters finally made the breakthrough, it came from the boot of Bell half an hour in. The corner was hit low and hard to the near post where the outstretched leg of Furlong prodded it in from close range.

The relief echoed around a strangely subdued Kenilworth Road. Vale's few away fans didn't help generate much of an atmosphere, but the move of the match on 39 minutes did.

Slick passing between Furlong and Edwards in the middle put Vale on the back foot before Edwards' ball through put Spring in the clear.

Sadly the midfielder couldn't cap the move with a goal, firing wide.

The visitors rarely threatened David Forde's goal, bar a decent long range effort from David McGoldrick, and their prospects of getting something from the game looked bleak when three minutes from the break they were reduced to ten men.

Spring pushed Port Vale's George Pilkington in middle of the pitch and a free kick was rightly awarded. As the players walked away Ashley Westwood approached referee Paul Melin and a straight red was issued, much to the dismay of his teammates.

Vale were there for the taking in the second half but chances were thin on the ground.

On 57 minutes Morgan reached the byline with a mazy run before lofting cross for Furlong at far post. The ball went over Anyon but the Luton striker headed back into his direc-

tion and the goalkeeper gathered.

Moments later Furlong bundled the ball in the net but the goal ruled out for handball and he was booked, tarnishing an otherwise faultless performance from the veteran.

There were other noteworthy performances from individuals but as a team, there still seems to be something missing with Blackwell's Town. The 'killer' second came on 86 minutes when man of the match Bell turned from provider to match-winner.

He and Richard Jackson exchanged passes before the winger looked up and smashed the ball in off the post from just outside the area.

As the time hit 90 minutes Luton let in yet another late goal. Shane Tudor curled his corner in and after a scramble the ball reached diminutive striker Rodgers who got in front of Forde to head in Vale's consolation goal.

stats corner

MAN OF THE MATCH



David Bell

Fantastic strike capped a top display from the skilful winger

THE SQUAD

Forde; Jackson, Perry, Coyne, Goodall; Bell, Spring, Robinson, Edwards (McVeigh 71m), Morgan (Currie 65m); Furlong (Andrew 87m). Subs: Fojut, Talbot.

MATCH FACTS

CORNERS

LUTON 12 PORT VALE 1

OFFSIDE

LUTON 4 PORT VALE 0

SHOTS ON TARGET

LUTON 10 PORT VALE 4

SHOTS OFF TARGET

LUTON 11 PORT VALE 2

BOOKINGS

LUTON 0

Furlong 60

PORT VALE 2

Westwood 42 (red), Ricjards 73.

ATTENDANCE:

6,084

REFEREE

PAUL MELIN (SURREY)

FOOTBALL LEAGUE ONE

Brighton	1	Yeovil	2
Carlisle	1	Bristol R	1
Cheltenham	1	Tranmere	1
Crewe	0	Millwall	0
Leeds	2	Swansea	0
Leyton Orient	2	Hartlepool	4
Luton	2	Port Vale	1
Northampton	3	Huddersf'd	0
Nottm Forest	4	Gillingham	0
Southend	3	Doncaster	2
Swindon	4	Bournem'th	1
Walsall	0	Oldham	3

NATIONAL LEAGUE ONE TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leyton O	7	5	1	1	11	7	16
Tranmere	7	4	2	1	10	5	14
Hartlepool	7	4	1	2	14	9	13
Yeovil	7	4	1	2	7	5	13
Southend	7	4	0	3	12	11	12
Carlisle	7	3	2	2	7	5	11
Swindon	7	2	4	1	10	7	10
Swansea	7	3	1	3	9	9	10
Bristol Rvrs	7	2	4	1	8	9	10
Notts Forest	6	2	3	1	9	4	9
Northampton	7	2	3	2	11	8	9
Brighton	7	3	0	4	10	10	9
Luton	7	3	0	4	10	10	9
Crewe	7	2	3	2	6	7	9
Huddersf'd	7	3	0	4	6	11	9
Cheltenham	7	2	2	2	7	8	8
Doncaster	7	2	1	4	8	10	7
Leeds	7	7	0	0	16	3	6
Oldham	6	2	0	4	6	8	6
Gillingham	7	2	0	5	4	14	6
B'mouth	7	1	2	4	4	9	5
Millwall	7	1	2	4	3	8	5
Port Vale	7	1	2	4	3	8	5
Walsall	7	1	2	4	5	11	5