

Lilies so close to shocking Split

 **HAJDUK**

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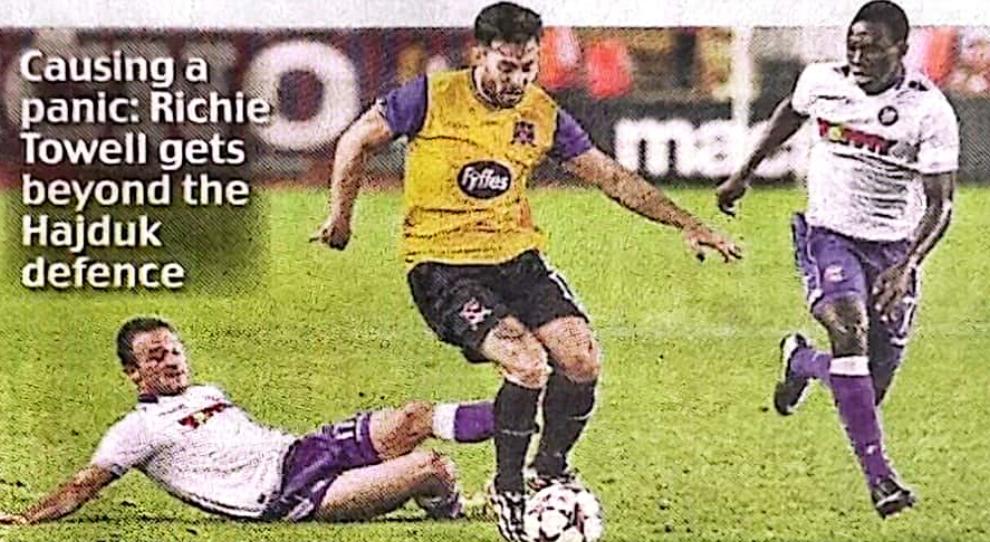
 **DUNDALK**

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(Hajduk Split win 3-2 on agg)

DUNDALK'S Europa League adventure is over despite coming close to a shock result over Hajduk Split in Croatia last night. Stephen Kenny's men needed just one more goal to go through on away goals after Jean Evrad Kouassi 25th-minute opener ensured the tie would not go to extra-time.

Dundalk hit back through Patrick Hoban and Kurtis Byrne in the second half to give the Lilywhites a 2-1 win on the night but it was not enough. Dundalk dominated the opening stages but it wasn't until the 23rd minute when a first-time pass from John



Causing a panic: Richie Towell gets beyond the Hajduk defence

Mountney rebounded into the path of Richie Towell, whose half volley went straight at Dante Zipica in the Hajduk goal. Two minutes later it was 1-0 as Sandro Gotal flicked the ball into the on rushing Kouassi and he finished neatly. Donal McDermott responded with a blocked shot and Marko Bencun had a header blocked at the other end.

Towell and Kouassi traded shots to open the second half but both were blazed over the bar as the hosts began to gain the upper hand in the midfield battle. However, the visitors were handed a lifeline on 66 minutes when Goran Jovinovic's attempted back pass was picked up by Hoban, who rounded Stipica to score. Andy Boyle then blazed wide

after Towell's free-kick fell to him but seconds later, Dundalk went 2-1 up on the night when a perfect Chris Shields pass picked out Kurtis Byrne to finish. Gotal's late free-kick almost levelled the game while Towell had one final effort from long range, but despite their late pressure, the visitors were unable to conjure up another clear-cut opportunity and were knocked out despite their brave effort.

HAJDUK SPLIT: Stipica; Nzic, Maloca, Mlivoic, Jozinovic; Vlasic (Maloku 75), Caktas (Bradaric 46), Bencun; Andelkovic, Gotal, Kouassi (Maglaca 61).

Scorer: Kouassi 25.

DUNDALK: Sava; Gannon, Gartland, Boyle, Massey; Shields, Higgins (Meenan 86); Mountney, Towell, McDermott (Hoban 57); McMillan (Byrne 68).

Scorers: Hoban 66, Byrne 74.

Referee: I Avram (Romania).

DARREN CRAWLEY