



Town fail to narrow the gap

LUTON do not have to be told how costly that last minute winner by Barnsley has been to their promotion cause.

Post photographer KEITH DOBNEY was at Barnsley last night to capture two memorable moments for Luton — elation when Keen's header (left) bounced home and despair (below) when Busby slid the ball wide of an open goal.

LUTON FAIL BY SECONDS

BARNSELY 2 LUTON 1

FOR LUTON's sake I wish the swirling blizzard which swept Yorkshire this morning had breezed in last night and they might have had a stay of execution and eventually a reprieve. As it was they pulled the blindfold on their promotion chances which now look to be slim.

Most disturbing is that the Town went under to a goal in the draining seconds of the match after fighting back to erase a first-half Barnsley lead.

Afterwards Luton director Mr Tom Hodgson pulled a long face and said to me: "I'm glad I haven't got your job. How in Heaven's name do you explain that?"

It is hard to explain — but not to describe. It was little more than lack of concentration on Luton's part. For an hour they had taken a bit of a battering from mobile, push-and-run Barnsley.

Then they clenched their teeth and skipper Mike Keen, who did the work of two men, headed Luton back into the game from a Busby cross in the 59th minute.

Greedy

And for half an hour Luton gave the Tykes some of their own medicine and looked good for at least one point — if not both. Perhaps two would have been greedy — but a draw would certainly have been fair.

Ironically it was the two new boys Viv Busby and Alan Starling, who played such a big part in Luton's Easter revival, who can be said to have a hand, however small, in this decline.

It seems cruel to single out these two incidents but facts are facts. Six minutes from the end Busby collected a suicidal back pass from Boardman and from the six-yard line pushed the ball fractionally wide as goalkeeper Sherratt swallowed at his feet. He should have scored.

And in the almighty mix-up at the other end in the 89th minute goalkeeper Alan Starling let the greasy ball squirt out of his grasp like a piece of soap — and it bobbed agonisingly into the path of Hamstead who sent home a triumphant winner with Luton's Ryan trying desperately to stop it with arms and legs.

Late

I must hasten to add that Starling and Busby both did good work. And some of the blame for that dying seconds goal must go to other parts of the Town defence. Branston missing a late tackle on Loyden who got in the first shot.

The most tragic thing about this Luton defeat is that it

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

MATCH DETAILS

BARNSELY: Sherratt, Murphy, Raggett, Bettany, Winstanley, Howard, Dean, Hamstead, Loyden, Boardman, Barrowclough. Sub: Booth.

LUTON TOWN: Starling, Ryan, Bannister, Slough, Branston, Moore, Collins, Busby, Macdonald, Keen, Harrison. Sub: Allen.

Goals: Dean (Barnsley 36) Keen (Luton 59) Hamstead (Barnsley 89).

Referee: Mr D. Corbett (Wolverhampton).

Attendance: 9,760.

came on a night when Laurie Sheffield, the former Luton centre forward, tried to help his old mates by stealing a point for Doncaster at Bristol Rovers — one of the clubs Luton are striving to overtake.

So now we are no nearer a solution. Luton can still slide into second place but of their remaining six matches four are away — at Halifax, Fulham, Mansfield, and Rochdale, not what you call an easy programme. And Orient look home and dry.

Magnificent

For 89 minutes last night Luton's defence was magnificent. Ryan, Branston, Moore and Bannister did a tremendous job in limiting Barnsley to one goal. That came in the 36th minute and was a picture to see.

Big Eddie Loyden escaped from Slough, jumped over Branston's tackle on the right touch line and centred. Waiting in the middle was Norman Dean, who celebrated his return from suspension by banging it past Starling with a first time scissors kick.

The early stages of the match provided fluctuating excitement as both sides contested everything with fierce ambition. It was a high-speed thriller on a greasy surface and a reward for the 10,000 who braved the bitter cold.

Busby, Keen, and Collins combined well, but Luton

found themselves relying on the tackling of Ryan and Bannister as the Reds challenged from the flanks. Both Luton backs did grand jobs.

Starling again showed some good handling — even when Luton had to contend with a sleet blizzard in their faces.

Luton's defence bent under the pressure — but rarely gave. And there was a brief relief for the Town when Keen headed in a Collins corner in the 29th minute, but it was disallowed when referee Corbett ruled Keen had pushed a defender. It looked all right to me.

Working well with Macdonald, Collins and Keen, Busby found out that it's harder away from home than in front of your own crowd. He discovered what it's all about, but never stopped trying.

Slough still has to find his early-season form, but this did not affect his work rate. In fact he put in Luton's best shot which Sherratt did well to make a diving save.

Then Keen, who had another tremendous match, headed in Busby's beautiful cross after some work by Macdonald. It was anyone's game.

But then Hamstead popped up with Barnsley's winner and Luton trooped off dejectedly.

Harrison did not contribute a lot on the left and I would have given sub Keith Allen the last half hour to try to swing the balance with his graft. But it was not to be and Luton came home pointless faced with a trip to Halifax on Saturday.



TOP FIVE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Orient	39	21	11	7	57	28	53
Bristol R	42	19	15	8	74	50	53
Brighton	43	22	9	12	53	38	53
Luton Tn	40	19	12	9	70	42	50
Barnsley	43	18	14	11	62	52	50