

NOW FOR EASTER AS TOWN WIN THRILLER

LUTON TOWN 3 BIRMINGHAM 2

THIS SECOND DIVISION promotion race is as perplexing as an Agatha Christie thriller. Leicester opened a gap at the top with a fine win at Carlisle on Saturday but resilient Luton kept themselves in the picture with a storybook fight-back that was straight out of Boys' Own.

The Town deserve every bit of praise they can squeeze out of this victory and immediately after the match their manager Alec Stock, his chest stuck out proudly, was the first to dole it out.

"What a magnificent show that was," he told me. "When we were two down I began to look the other way and when we were one ahead I wanted the powers of Merlin.

"All I wanted to do was to wave the old wand and turn this team of 21-year-olds into a team full of mature 28-year-olds.

"But they hung on for me. I can't say enough. I was delighted for Viv Busby that he got those two goals. He's had a lot of bad luck this season.

"It was going to be his year but we found a winning team and he wasn't included for most of the time. Suddenly a lad with all the hopes in the world finds himself in the London Midweek League. It's not on, is it?"

Head injury

Busby is, in fact, taking a curtain call. He is doing for Luton this season just what he did last when he was one of the salient factors in their winning promotion.

His two first-half goals on Saturday put Luton back in the reckoning after they had been sent reeling by early Birmingham goals from Latchford and Summerill, the second while the Blues were down to ten men with Smith in the dressing room having treatment for a head injury.

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

The first was Nicholl's fault. He failed to clear a soft through ball and Latchford ran round him and scuffed his shot past Read.

In the 22nd minute Read was left stranded on his line, as if planted, when Summerill was politely left alone to head in Latchford's cross.

It looked like the end of Luton's Division One ambitions. The fact that they did not really deserve to be trailing does not make any difference to the hard facts of goals against. They were playing the better football in midfield and attacking smoothly via the wings.

But it did not look as if there would be any reward. Then Busby headed a Macdonald pass between two converging defenders and helped himself to a brave goal by placing the ball neatly wide of Kelly.

And before half-time he stuck out a foot and diverted a Macdonald shot past Kelly. Afterwards the Luton centre-forward said: "It just caught the end of his boot. It's a good job he had not cut his toenails."

Keen got through a terrific amount of work in midfield, where he had willing support from Givens, who had a fine match. Even taking into account Busby's goals, I made Jimmy Ryan man of the match. Prompting from the middle and attacking from the wing, Birmingham had no

answer to his speed and control.

He has developed the ability to show an opponent the ball, make him go for it, and then flick it out his way that last minute and go past.

There was some courageous running from Anderson on the left and he was unlucky not to score in the first half. Once he nets his first league goal the tension will go and he should score regularly. He is certainly getting into the right positions.

Dependable

Both full-backs John Ryan and Slough had outstanding matches, and Ryan and John Moore marked the promising Birmingham youngster Trevor Francis out of the match. Moore again did well, giving his usual dependable performance.

Slough scored Luton's winner soon after the interval to end the Midland side's run of 14 matches without defeat. Keen and Macdonald were arguing who should take a free kick from the best part of 30 yards out, when Slough ran up and smashed it into the net before the City defence could build a wall.

What a valuable goal it turned out to be. As everyone has been saying for a long time, this division is going to be settled over Easter.

Before then Luton must concentrate on getting Nicholl fully fit. It was his foot injury which cost Luton their first goal and he was not at his best throughout as a result.

MATCH DETAILS

Luton: Read; John Ryan, Slough, Givens, Nicholl, Moore, Jimmy Ryan, Busby, Macdonald, Keen, Anderson. Sub: Goodeve.

Birmingham: Kelly; Martin, Page, Smith, Hynd, Robinson, Campbell, Francis, Latchford, Summerill, Taylor. Sub: Pendrey.

Referee: Mr F. M. Nicholson (Manchester).

Attendance: 25,172.

Goals: Latchford (B'ham) 5 min, Summerill (B'ham) 22, Busby (Luton) 36 and 43, Slough (Luton) 48.