

Francis goal settles the issue

72/73 (FLC)

BIRMINGHAM City needed four hours forty-seven minutes of Football League Cup battling on three grounds to nose ahead of Luton for the first time, thus winning their marathon from the final bend.

by DENNIS SHAW

Certainly Luton were entitled, after their 1-0 second replay defeat at Northampton, to feel as sick as a long distance runner who loses after leading for all but the final few steps.

A rare goal by Francis, only his second in 10 appearances this season, gave Blues a money-spinning third round tie with Coventry at St. Andrew's. It is a pairing to whet the appetite of Blues supporters, though it never looked on until the last 13 minutes.

Overdrive

Frankly, Blues never played well at any stage of the final 90 minutes, apart from creating and scoring a delightful, decisive goal.

Page, who has certainly improved the side, set up the move for Hatton to feed Bob

Latchford on the left. Latchford, who had rarely made the slightest impact, beat two defenders by switching into overdrive before squaring to Francis.

At last the tie which, to say the least, had dragged on, was settled, Luton lacking the power the re-establish a grip they had begun to lose midway through the half.

A decisive factor in their downfall was an injury to midfield man Anderson, their best player. Hynd was cautioned for a tackle on Anderson, though it was motivated by determination rather than unfair intent. It left Anderson needing attention.

Hynd was one of three Blues' names to go into the book. The

others were Hope for dissent and Burns for a tackle.

Until they slowly took over in the second-half, Blues were subjected to a similar attacking barrage as that which all but put them out in the first replay at Luton.

Busby, Halom, Aston, Fern and Jimmy Ryan all had good scoring attempts which contrasted with the rare thrusts by Blues.

Burns was close with a header and Francis hit one shot just wide with a quick turn and jab but otherwise Blues were occupied mainly in midfield and defence.

Easy ride

Goalkeeper Dave Latchford saw far more of the action than Barber, who played in the Luton goal with a gash in his hand and must have welcomed his easy ride.

It was certainly a wise move on Manager Mr. Freddie Goodwin's part to recall Dave Latchford from Wolves before the end of his loan period.

He made three good saves to prevent Luton going ahead as they had done in the previous two encounters.

BIRMINGHAM CITY: Latchford (D); Carroll, Pendrey, Campbell, Hynd, Page, Burns, Francis, Latchford (R), Hope, Hatton. Sub: Whitehead.

LUTON TOWN: Barber; Ryan (John), Thompson, Anderson, Faulkner, Garner, Ryan (Jim), Fern, Busby, Halom, Aston. Sub: (for Anderson) Slough.

NEXT MATCH: Everton (home), Saturday