

SUNDERLAND SMASH THE CUP DREAM

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THE TOWN'S dream of Wembley turned into a nightmare at Roker Park on Saturday when the team that has beaten all the odds to reach the last eight in the FA Cup were cut down to size on an afternoon when nothing would go right.

Sunderland, for all the fanaticism of their supporters, were a very ordinary team turned into Cup semi-finalists more by the Town's abysmal failure to get into the match than by their own skills.

It was tragic that the Town's worst performance of the season should crop up on such an important day.

And long after the final whistle, the disconsolate Town team were still unable to work out why things had gone so wrong. They did not fashion a single worthwhile attack throughout the 90 minutes, and once Sunderland had scored the match was over.

At the end of the game, I felt sick for Luton, and for what might have been—the sort of feeling I had on the night in 1959 when the Town lost at Wembley.

But this week, there is not even the consolation of knowing that the Town had played well and come within reach of victory.

Against the honest toil and willing running of Sunderland, the Town had nothing to offer but defence.

At half-time, with the scoresheet blank, I thought the Town were home and dry for a replay at Kenilworth Road.

We had seen little flowing football from either side, and although Sunderland had

shown more signs of attacking than the Town, the defence, with John Moore outstanding, looked capable of maintaining its record of not giving away a single goal in the cup.

It looked promising: at Newcastle and Bolton, the defence had paved the way for victory by absorbing heavy punishment and then setting up counter-punch goals.

But the system broke down on Saturday, because Sunderland faced no threat at all from the Town's forwards. John Aston and Jim Ryan were given no scope, and it was one long struggle in midfield for the Town.

Don Shanks had no chance

MATCH DETAILS

SUNDERLAND 2, LUTON TOWN 0

Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Thomson, Garner, Moore; Shanks, Hindson, Anderson; Jim Ryan, Busby, Aston (Hales, 71 minutes).

SUNDERLAND: Montgomery; Malone, Guthrie, Watson, Pitt; Horswill, Kerr, Porterfield; Hughes, Halom, Tueart. Sub: Young, not used.

GOALS: Watson, Sunderland, 55 minutes; Guthrie, Sunderland 81 minutes.

ATTENDANCE: 53,156: Biggest of the day.

REFEREE: Jack Taylor, Wolverhampton: probably the best performer on the field.

ENTERTAINMENT: Nil.

to show off his attacking skills, because his services were needed too often at the back. Peter Anderson and Viv Busby couldn't get going, and the delicate touches of Gordon Hindson made no impression on the game at all.

There were times when the Town lived dangerously at the back, with Keith Barber let off the hook by some poor Sunderland finishing.

But Bobby Thomson, Alan Garner and John Moore looked as though they might save the Town's face with their rearguard action, and as at Newcastle and Bolton they were always willing to concede corners to halt attacks.

Sunderland won a dozen to the Town's two, and both goals came from corners.

In the 55th minute, Thomson conceded one which was cleared for another by Garner. And this time, no-one picked up Sunderland centre-back Dave Watson, who ran in from outside the penalty area to meet Bobby Kerr's flag kick with a header which streaked into the net.

It was the first goal scored against the Town in 325 minutes of Cup soccer, but another followed nine minutes from the end.

This time, Barber went full-length to flick a shot from Billy Hughes around the post. It was a great save—but the corner from Kerr was met by Ritchie Pitt's header to defender Ron Guthrie who spun on his heel to score with a volley from close range.

The game was well and truly over by then. John Aston had already been pulled off to make way for Derek Hales, but it was one of those days when half a dozen subs could have done nothing for the Town.

So we are left with feelings about what might have been. The glum faces of Town supporters on the long motorway trek home told their own story.

Town coach Roy McCrohan said: "We're all a bit sick—especially for the supporters."

The defeat was a bitter disappointment. But it will be forgotten long before we forget the matches that led up to it, and in my book the cup run and that famous victory at Newcastle has done the Town a power of good.

It lifted the club and the Town out of a rut, and sad though Saturday's result was, the team deserves every credit for getting so near to Wembley's magical twin towers.



One wide, and a penalty turned down

WITH the Town pushed well back on to defence, expeditions to the Sunderland goal area were few and far between, but these pictures by Geoff Garratt show two of the Town's flashes.

Above, John Aston, who had a very quiet game, brings a grimace to the face of Sunderland goalkeeper Jim Montgomery, by going in for a hard cross near the post.

Peter Anderson is the other Town player in the picture. This move, as it turned out, was the Town's nearest approach to the Sunderland net. The

ball flew off Aston's foot wide of the target.

In the picture below, Derek Hales, who substituted for Aston, is pictured a split second before he was brought down by Sunderland defender Dick Malone.

It was right on the edge of the penalty area, and Hales thought it should have been a penalty. But referee Jack Taylor ruled that it was a fair tackle, and waved play on.



'Our worst display of the season'—

HARRY HASLAM