

Title challenge starts to look more realistic

LUTON TOWN 2, BURNLEY 3.

BURNLEY kept the momentum of their gradually improving title challenge rolling along with this important victory over bottom-of-the-table Luton Town on Saturday. The Clarets' performance was not always totally convincing. But it was good enough.

The secret of their success was in the finishing. Burnley created perhaps six 100 per cent. chances — and converted three of them into goals. They were only prevented on another occasion by the thickness of the crossbar.

Luton, on the other hand, sent many more shots and headers in the direction of the Burnley goal. But only two of them found the net.

One of the chief reasons was the brilliance of Alan Stevenson.

If goalkeepers decide the fate of the championship (as Stoke are claiming) then Burnley must have a great chance.

Out of half a dozen outstanding saves (plus immaculate handling throughout) Stevenson made one first half catch from ex-Claret man Alan West that was breath-taking.

Few goalkeepers would have laid a hand on the 20-yard rocket shot from West. Yet Stevenson

EXCELLENT VICTORY

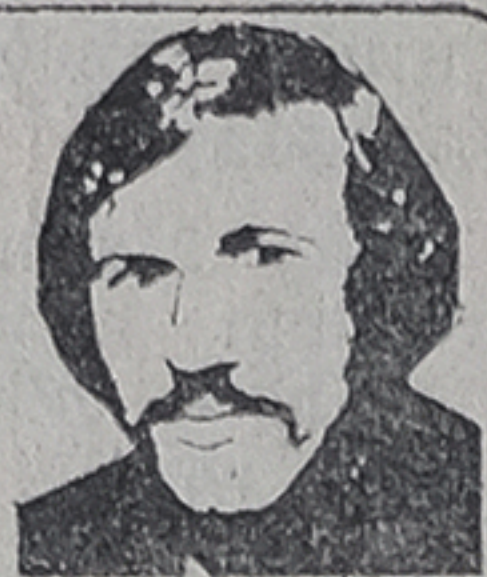
MIDFIELD man Peter Noble, who suffered a recurrence of his ligament injury on Saturday, was the only member of Burnley's first team under treatment yesterday.

Manager Jimmy Adamson said: "Peter has been playing only 80 per cent. fit. We hope that with no midweek match this week he will be able to get enough rest and treatment to finally clear up the injury."

● Mr Adamson described the victory on Saturday as "excellent." He added: "It was a bit like playing a team from a lower division in the cup where they keep coming at you."

"It was a difficult match but we did well to come through and win."

PETER HIGGS reports



moved so quickly that he was able to clutch the ball as it sped towards the top corner.

In difficult muddy conditions, against opponents desperate for points, Burnley's display was good without often reaching any great heights.

Apart from Stevenson there were few outstanding individual performances. But the team generally played as well as they had to, and provided more than their share of bright moments in a thoroughly entertaining game.

Desire

Peter Noble, in a more defensive role than his goal-scoring style of last week, got through a tremendous amount of good work in the middle of the field — where the mud was thickest.

Leighton James, now back in his old irrepressible form, showed he could beat full-back Bobby Thomson whenever he wanted to, and was a persistent danger to the Luton defence.

Ian Brennan did a lot of good things, breaking swiftly from the back and setting up a lot of promising attacks.

And there was the finishing of Ray Hankin. In his 50th First Division game the big striker knocked in two well-taken goals to make him Burnley's leading scorer — and was robbed of the "goal of the match" when his perfectly struck volley smacked against the bar and flew back out.

Luton put a lot into the match and also played some enterprising football at times. But they were suspect at the back and Burnley gave the impression that if it had been necessary for them to score more than three goals they could have done so.

The one disappointing aspect of Burnley's play was the ease with which Luton got through for shots at goal. Burnley were opened up too often for comfort but this can be partly attributed to their own desire to attack.

Harry Haslam's team earned full marks for pluck

In the 49th minute JAMES swapped passes with Ingham and ran on to drive a low, angled shot into the net from eight yards.

Luton hit back to equalise for the second time when Jim Ryan's perfectly hit centre on the run was headed home at the far post by SPIRING.

The winner, in the 53rd minute, was another simple yet well-taken effort. James took two defenders out of the game with a quick run and pulled back the centre, which Ingham stepped over giving HANKIN time and room to send a first-time right foot shot into the bottom corner from 10 yards.

It only remained for Noble to produce a fine goal-line headed clearance to deny substitute Alston and Burnley held out for a most welcome win that leaves them only three behind the leaders.

Consistency

It was important that Burnley got a good result and with five points taken from the last three matches they seem now to be finding the kind of consistency that can enable their bid for the top to be taken seriously.

Luton Town (in 4-3-3): Barber; John Ryan, Faulkner, Garner, Thomson; John Ryan, Anderson, West; Husband (sub. Alston, 75 minutes), Spiring, Aston.

Burnley: Stevenson; Newton, Waldron, Rodaway, Brennan; Ingham, Noble, Collins; Hankin, Fletcher, James. Sub: Flynn (not used).

Referee: Mr J. Taylor, of Wolverhampton.

Attendance: 11,816.



ALAN STEVENSON . . . kept Burnley alive with a string of fine saves.