

MISTAKES LET TWO MORE POINTS SLIP

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THE RECORD BOOKS will show that Chelsea beat the Town at Stamford Bridge. But that's not half the real story — it was just as much a case of the Town chucking it away with the sort of mistakes that should not be made in the Fourth Division let alone the First.

Chelsea, surely relegation candidates as much as the Town, were allowed to win when they should have been dead and buried in the first 25 minutes.

Two remarkable misses, by Spiring and Alston, meant that at half-time the match was balanced evenly, with neither side able to score.

The Town were well below par, but no worse than Chelsea, until they gave away the vital goal four minutes after the break. And from then on the only bright spots were the promise of better things to come, from new boys Paul Fletcher and Steve Buckley.

Buckley came in for Bobby Thompson, and did well enough to warrant another chance.

That was his second game in Division One, and it seems to me that as the Town now need to think about next season's needs, Buckley should be given more experience.

The same goes for Paul Fletcher, making his debut. He slotted into Alan Garner's place with the coolness and assurance of a player who obviously has a very bright future.

The third change in defence was not so successful, because Graham Horn, recalled in preference to Keith Barber, had obviously lost some of his sharpness in his long spell in the reserves.

Chelsea gave him few problems in the first half, but his mistake gave away the first goal, and from then on the whole Town team lost its rhythm.

And on that form, they are nowhere near good enough to stay in the First Division.

It's hard to accept that your favourite team is facing relegation. I don't think the Town manager or directors dare make such an admission themselves in public.

I accept that the match is never lost till the final whistle sounds, and that relegation must be fought until the day it is mathematically inevitable.

But the truth is that the Town got to

MATCH DETAILS

CHelsea 2, LUTon TOWN 0
Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Horn, John Ryan, Buckley, Anderson, Faulkner, Paul Fletcher, Jim Ryan, Alston, Spiring, West, Aston. Sub: Husband, not used.

CHelsea: Phillips, Locke, Wilkins (G), Hay, Harris, Wilkins (R), Cooke, Kember, Garland, Hutchinson, Sissons. Sub: Houseman, not used.

THE GOALS: Hutchinson, 49 minutes, after Horn put a goal kick straight to Garland; Kember, 75 minutes, from low cross by Hutchinson.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very little. "What a load of rubbish" chanted the fans. It was.

REFEREE: Peter Walter, Bridgwater: he played better than the Town did.

ATTENDANCE: 19,009, and the atmosphere was pathetic.

BOOKING: John Ryan for pulling down Garland. TOWN'S LEAGUE POSITION: Bottom, seven points below survival place. It needs a miracle now.

Report: BRIAN SWAIN—Pictures: MICK HAWES

Division One too quickly — it has been made cruelly obvious that they were not fully equipped for it this season.

So now perhaps we should think about next season — and that means the Town must build another promotion side on a shoestring. I believe most of the raw material is already available and it now needs a brave but careful policy of blending in more youngsters.

On Saturday, Chelsea were a right load of rubbish. Kember bounced a header on to the top of the bar from a long free kick by Hay, but the Town had easily the best two chances of the first half.

Alston made the first, going round Hay at speed and then drawing another defender before pushing the ball through to Spiring.

He timed his run perfectly, but as goalkeeper Phillips rushed out he put his shot a yard or two wide of the post.

That was bad enough, but three minutes later Alston missed an even easier chance. Anderson burst through on the right, left Hay trailing, slipped a tackle from Wilkins and then crossed from near the goal-line.

Phillips was left stranded and all Alston had to do was tap the ball into the empty net. Unaccountably he failed to make contact, and the ball bobbled away to safety through his legs.

The only other incident of note in a generally boring first half was that John Ryan was booked for

pulling down Garland, and after Kember's free kick Hay's header bounced to safety off the top of the bar.

If the score-line had remained blank for the rest of the match it might have been a fair reflection on the quality of the soccer.

But from the Town's point of view things got worse as the match wore on. Horn sent a goal kick direct to Garland on Chelsea's right. Buckley fell as he tried to challenge, and the defence was nowhere as Garland's cross went over and Hutchinson headed a gift goal.

The defensive marking was just as bad when Chelsea ended the contest 15 minutes from time. Hutchinson crossed low from the right and Kember scored. Faulkner's despairing effort to scoop the shot clear on the line only helped the ball into the net.

I am not sure that Chelsea really were two goals better than the Town. But at least they took the chances that came their way. The Town only made two, and fluffed them both.



Anderson tries to break through

● PETER Anderson, pictured in action above on another run through the Chelsea midfield, showed signs of being able to spark the Town to life at Stamford Bridge.

But the longer the game wore on, the more ineffective the Town became. Jim Ryan and Alan West were both subdued, and there was a sad lack of fight after Chelsea scored their first goal.

Peter Spiring was not as penetrating as he might have been, although he often threatened to cause the home defence trouble.

The Chelsea back line was pulled apart in the incident pictured below. Spiring dived to head just wide of the target, but the linesman's flag was already up for offside.

SLIPPING BEHIND

THE TOWN'S defeat at Stamford Bridge made the relegation battle tougher still. They go to Liverpool on Saturday to complete the first half of the season's six points behind the next strugglers, Carlisle and Leicester.

The League table after Saturday's matches:

	HOME					AWAY				
	P	W	D	L	F A	P	W	D	L	F A
Stoke	21	7	4	0	21 9	3	3	4	15	16
Everton	20	5	6	0	16 8	2	6	1	13	11
Manchester City	21	10	1	0	22 5	1	3	6	7	21
Liverpool	20	6	2	2	19 10	4	3	3	8	6
West Ham	21	7	1	2	27 12	3	4	4	12	17
Ipswich	21	8	2	0	20 3	3	0	8	8	15
Burnley	21	6	2	3	23 15	4	2	4	15	17
Derby	20	6	2	1	22 11	2	5	4	12	18
Middlesbrough	20	3	4	2	15 12	5	2	4	13	14
Newcastle	20	7	3	1	19 8	1	3	5	9	20
Sheffield Utd	20	6	3	2	18 13	2	2	5	11	20
Leeds	21	6	2	2	17 7	2	2	7	11	17
Birmingham	21	6	1	4	21 16	2	3	5	10	16
Wolves	20	4	4	2	17 12	2	4	4	7	13
Tottenham	21	4	3	4	15 11	3	2	5	12	16
Coventry	21	3	5	2	15 14	2	3	6	13	25
QPR	21	2	5	9	11 3	3	5	13	19	17
Arsenal	20	4	3	2	16 7	2	1	8	8	20
Chelsea	20	2	5	3	12 15	2	3	5	9	20
Carlisle	21	4	1	5	8 8	2	2	7	11	17
Leicester	19	3	3	4	10 9	2	2	5	10	18
Luton Town	20	1	3	6	10 17	0	4	6	7	16



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