

FIRST GOAL KILLED OFF THE FIGHTING SPIRIT

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By Brian Swain

AT HALF-TIME at Anfield on Saturday, there were signs that even if they did not look equipped to beat the cup-holders, the Town and their fighting spirit could give Liverpool enough problems to bring back a point.

But when the second half was only 74 seconds old Liverpool scored, and the Town looked like losers from then on. As Liverpool's confidence grew, so the Town's fell away, and in the end they were beaten by a Liverpool team which was under fire from its own supporters as being vastly below par.

The Town started to lose out in midfield, and the brightest rays of hope came from the new-look defence: Graham Horn looked much better than he did the previous week, and the two youngsters, Paul Futchner and Steve Buckley, both had good games.

COOL AND CALM

Futchner, achieving a personal ambition by making his first appearance at Liverpool, was cool and calm almost to the point of being cocky, and Buckley worked hard for the whole 90 minutes.

John Faulkner and John Ryan also kept battling away, but in other departments of the team there were signs that some players lose the stomach to fight after the first reverse. Liverpool were not half the team they were at Kenilworth Road on the first day of the season, and until the interval the Town deserved to be still in the game.

Horn made a brilliant reflex save from Toshack, and the Liverpool defence was looking decidedly dodgy when Peter Anderson "scored" after 15 minutes.

That effort was disallowed for offside, but the build-up was promising, with

The 'goal' that didn't count

PETER Anderson "scores" for the Town: Ray Clemence is beaten and Emlyn Hughes is left trailing as Anderson, on the right, nets after a through-ball from Alan West. But defender Phil Neal, to the left of Clemence, is already appealing for offside. Referee Ken Burns agreed, and Liverpool escaped.

Anderson starting it in midfield. He gave the ball to West, who held it while Anderson made a forward run.

West's through-pass had everything right except the timing, and Liverpool so nearly paid the penalty for having a slow, square defence.

Liverpool have been going through a bad patch, but they looked more capable of scoring than the Town, and Horn had to tip over a Toshack header from a cross by McDermott to keep the scoresheet blank at half-time.

But the reprieve was only short. As Liverpool attacked the Kop end in the second half, the Town were caught cold on their right flank.

It started with a high clearance from defence. Heighway ran back from his forward position, and John Ryan went with him.

KEEGAN FREE

The ball passed over their heads, leaving Keegan free on the wing. As Futchner went to cover, Keegan put over a centre which McDermott flicked over his head, and Toshack slid the ball into the net at the far post.

Jim Ryan and Anderson combined to send Alan

West through down the Town's right, but his shot was easily saved by Clemence, and the Town's best effort of the match came soon after from Jimmy Husband. He headed inches too high after a cross by Jim Ryan.

CLOSE CALL

Toshack was even closer at the other end: the Town's defensive marking was slack as three Liverpool players waited for a centre by Keegan, and Toshack's header whacked against the bar.

RESTRICTED

The let-off brought no surging response from the Town. Instead the attack, barely visible for the last half-hour was restricted to one or two promising wing runs by Aston.

They came to nothing because there was no sign of anyone in the centre being capable of upsetting Liverpool's rearguard.

WELL BEATEN

Peter Spiring hardly had a look in, and with West and Jim Ryan forced to spend a lot of time helping out in defence the Town were well beaten by the time Heighway scored Liverpool's second goal six minutes from the end.

It followed a frantic siege

of the Town's goal. Keegan put over a corner from Liverpool's right, and Toshack headed it forward from the back of the penalty area.

Heighway tried to shoot for goal and the ball bounced off Buckley to Keegan. He shot and Horn got in the way, but Heighway met the rebound to score from the middle of a crowd of players.

It was a bit of a scramble, but on balance Liverpool were worth their victory. And I am getting weary of the traditional consolation comments we hear from opponents after each match.

'HARD LUCK'

They said it again in the Anfield boardroom: "Hard luck. You didn't look Second Division class today." I'm afraid that six defeats in a row rather outweighs the pious charity of that sort of remark.

One point taken from the last 20 tells its own story.

MATCH DETAILS

LIVERPOOL 2, LUTON TOWN 0

Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Horn, John Ryan, Buckley, Anderson, Faulkner, Futchner, Jim Ryan, Spiring, Husband, West, Aston. Sub: King, not used.

LIVERPOOL: Clemence, Smith, Neal, Thompson, Cormack, Hughes, Keegan, McDermott, Heighway, Toshack, Callaghan. Sub: Boersma, not used.

THE GOALS: Toshack, 46 minutes, after Keegan crossed from the Town's right; Heighway, 84 minutes, after Horn made point-blank save from Keegan.

ENTERTAINMENT: Reasonable in the first half, but the Town fell away badly after the break.

REFEREE: Ken Burns, Worcester: so good that no-one noticed him for long periods of the game.

ATTENDANCE: 35,091, Liverpool's lowest Saturday league gate of the season.

TOWN'S LEAGUE POSITION: Slipping further into trouble: bottom, eight points adrift of the lowest survival spot.



JOHN Faulkner goes up for a corner, but is foiled as Ray Clemence catches the ball at full stretch. Tommy Smith's is the body that looms large in the foreground.

Half-way table

THE FIRST Division league table after Saturday's games, the half-way mark of the Town's season:

	HOME							AWAY						
	P	W	D	Goals			P	W	D	Goals			Ps	
				L	F	A				L	F	A		
Everton	21	5	6	0	16	8	3	6	1	14	11	28		
Liverpool	21	7	2	2	21	10	4	3	3	8	6	27		
Stoke	22	7	4	0	21	9	3	5	5	16	19	27		
Man City	22	10	1	0	22	6	1	4	6	7	21	27		
Ipswich	22	9	2	0	24	3	3	0	8	8	15	26		
West Ham	22	7	2	2	27	12	3	4	4	12	17	26		
Middlesbro	22	5	4	2	21	12	5	2	4	13	14	26		
Burnley	22	6	2	3	23	15	4	2	5	17	21	24		
Derby Co	21	6	2	2	22	12	2	5	4	12	18	23		
Leeds	22	7	2	2	20	8	2	2	7	11	17	22		
Wolves	21	5	4	2	21	14	2	4	4	7	13	22		
Newcastle	21	7	3	1	19	8	1	3	6	9	22	22		
Sheff Utd	21	6	3	2	18	13	2	2	6	11	21	21		
Birmingham	22	6	1	4	21	16	2	3	6	10	19	20		
Coventry	22	4	5	2	17	14	2	3	6	13	25	20		
Tottenham	22	4	3	4	15	11	3	2	6	12	20	19		
QPR	22	4	2	5	10	11	3	3	5	13	19	19		
Chelsea	21	2	5	3	12	15	3	3	5	11	21	18		
Arsenal	21	4	4	2	16	7	2	1	8	8	20	17		
Leicester	21	3	3	4	10	9	2	3	6	10	21	16		
Carlisle	22	4	1	6	9	10	2	2	7	11	17	15		
Luton	21	1	3	6	10	17	0	4	7	7	18	9		