

SUPERB—BUT NOW WE SWEAT IT OUT

THE TOWN'S ability to escape relegation lay in their own hands, there is no way they could be tipped out of the First Division. Their victory at St Andrews—the third on the trot—underlined the obvious fact that the Town have now learned to cope with the demands of Division One.

The crying shame is that the lessons may have been learned just too late. Thinking back to the early part of the season, I can recall a dozen or more points that were there for the taking. And now we are left to sweat it out as Spurs and Chelsea fight to turn games in hand into points that can send the Town down even if they trounce Manchester City on Saturday.

On their form since Christmas, the Town are good enough to stay in a comfortable mid-table position in the First Division. If they do go down the consolation is that they should be well capable of thrashing just about everything in the Second Division.

Birmingham were made to look second class for the whole 90 minutes as the Town tore them apart and ran up their best win of the season.

Adrian Alston, brought back into the side after going out of favour for a spell, scored twice, and undoubtedly has delayed Ron Fletcher's return after suspension.

His first goal, just ten seconds before the interval, was the best goal I have seen from anyone this season, and it killed off Birmingham.

John Ryan, one of 11 Town stars, had given the Town the lead after 13 minutes. Alston was fouled by Calderwood ten yards outside the penalty area, and Ryan sent the ball bending round the defensive wall into the top corner of the net with a nonchalant ease that bordered on arrogance.

Calderwood hit the bar within a minute, but the Town had the beating of Birmingham from then on. They ran faster, used the ball better, and tackled harder than the home team.

John Aston tormented the Brummies' defence and Alston, Alan West and Jim Husband were all narrowly off target before Alston killed off Birmingham's challenge on his own. From about ten yards

outside the penalty area, he twisted and turned on a forward run. Defenders were left sitting on their backsides and Alston's shot was hammered into the top corner for a spectacular goal.

Three minutes after the interval, Alston's header at the near post from Aston's corner put the Town in easy street, and although the Town defence was caught out when Francis collected a long cross from Taylor to reduce the arrears, Birmingham rarely looked like getting back into the game.

Burns, a bundle of Scottish bad temper and inept foolishness, wasted a good chance when he hit the bar from about three yards after an error by Steve Buckley, but at the other end Alston missed a sitter that would have given him a well-deserved hat-trick.

Jim Ryan sent a hot shot whistling slightly too high after a good run and cross by Aston, but then helped to make the Town's fourth goal.

His crossfield pass towards the Town's left flank resulted in defender Page trying to collect it as he faced his own goal. I think he was looking for Aston, who had tormented him all afternoon, and allowed the ball to break free to Jim Husband. He took full toll. As goalkeeper Latchford raced out, Husband chipped the ball perfectly, over his head and into the empty net.

It was a beautiful goal, to complete a perfect day for the Town. Unfortunately, Jim Ryan's sending off, in the last minute, came near to souring the pleasure of the 89 minutes that went before.

But on a day when every Town player contributed to a resounding success, even that memory cannot lessen the delight the large contingent of Town fans felt. Nor should it.

Report by BRIAN SWAIN
Pictures: HARRY DOBKIN

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● AFTER THREADING his way past two defenders Adrian Alston, on the right, beats three more with his shot that put the Town two up at St Andrew's ten seconds before the interval.

Anger as Jim Ryan is sent off

AN UNPLEASANT incident just one minute before the end of the game marred the Town's pleasure at St Andrew's. Jimmy Ryan, whose skills had helped to demoralise Birmingham, was sent off for alleged violent conduct.

The decision, by Blackburn referee David Richardson, a late replacement for Ted Jolly of Manchester, incensed the

Luton players and officials.

Their anger was directed partly at him and partly at Birmingham City's striker Ken Burns, who gave a fair impression of James Cagney doing a dramatic death scene after he and Ryan clashed.

Birmingham tempers had become frayed as they piled one mistake upon another, and heard their own crowd describe them with the traditional disgruntled lament: "What a load of rubbish."

Ryan and Burns had been having a battle for some time, and Jim carried a bump on his head which the Town said was caused by a Burns attack which the referee missed.

Burns was determined that no-one should miss the incident that earned dismissal for Ryan. He writhed in apparent agony, and looked so crippled that you might have wondered if he had suddenly been struck down by some dastardly disease.

Miraculously, when Ryan was dismissed, Burns recovered completely, with a look of happy triumph on his face.

Coach Roy McCrohan summed up a lot of Town feelings when he went to



Jim Ryan

Burns at the end of the game and told him: "You're a disgrace to football."

Manager Harry Haslam agreed: "We shall certainly appeal against the sending-off," he said. "It was a blatant attempt by one professional footballer to get another sent off."

If the appeal fails, Ryan will be out of action for the first three games of next season. Defender Paul Fletcher is already out of the first match, for being sent off at Spurs.

MATCH DETAILS

BIRMINGHAM CITY 1, LUTON TOWN 4
Half-time: 0-2

TOWN: Barber, John Ryan, Buckley, Anderson, Faulkner, Litt, Jim Ryan, Husband, Alston, West, Aston. Sub: Spiring, not used.

BIRMINGHAM: Latchford, Page, Bryant, Kendall, Gallagher, Pendrey, Calderwood (Smith, 66 minutes), Francis, Burns, Hutton, Taylor.

THE GOALS: John Ryan for the Town, 13 minutes, scorching free kick from 30 yards; Adrian Alston for the Town, 10 seconds before the interval, brilliant solo effort; Alston again, 48 minutes, near post header from John Aston corner; Francis for Birmingham, 61 minutes, solo goal; Jim Husband for the Town, 75 minutes, brilliant chip after mistake by Page set him free.

ENTERTAINMENT: Tremendous for the Town fans—they made more noise than the home "supporters" who did nothing for Birmingham's confidence.

REFEREE: David Richardson, Blackburn—the players didn't rate him on the grounds that he let too much go unpunished early on, which brought trouble and the late sending-off.

ATTENDANCE: 28,755—and a lot of the Birmingham customers left long before the end.

BLACKSPOT: Jim Ryan sent off a minute before time after skirmish with Burns, who made a meal of the incident.



● Jim Ryan, number 7 back to the camera, is sent off, and Ken Burns, kneeling on the ground, laughs. Adrian Alston, on the right, can hardly believe it, while Jimmy Husband, on the left of Burns, looks at the Birmingham player with utter contempt.

On the other

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