

BAFFLED, BY CUP DISASTER

FORGET IT. That was Town manager Harry Haslam's advice to his baffled and bewildered players after Fourth Division Darlington had pushed the Town out of the League Cup.

But the Town players came back to Luton yesterday still trying to work out what had gone wrong.

They had been ahead at the interval, but Darlington's hard running and close marking, made a mockery of the difference in divisions.

And the manager admitted: "I don't want to take anything away from Darlington—they played very well. Now we have to learn a few lessons and get back to the job of doing well in the league."

Darlington forced the Town into the sort of errors that have not been seen before this season. Mistakes were made in all departments, and the Fourth Division side were able to gain mastery, not through superior skill, but through sheer hard work and enthusiasm.

They knocked the Town off balance with their vigorous approach, and some stern tackling, and there were times when it looked as though the Town had not geared themselves up to meet such old-fashioned tactics.

Darlington marked tightly and used the long ball, with men always ready to run for colleagues.

By contrast, the Town's composure was shattered, and time and time again they gave the ball away.

Yet they had the better of the first half and Ron Futcher forced goalkeeper Ogley to go full length, and then put a header narrowly wide.

Between these two efforts he got himself booked for throwing the ball at the ref after a foul had been given against him, but it looked as though he might have the last laugh when he scored after 42 minutes.

The move started with a long free kick from Buckley being headed out. Ogley saved Ron Futcher's first shot, but then casually cleared the ball to full-back Nattress, and in a flash Futcher robbed him, dribbled round the goalkeeper and scored a goal that silenced the enthusiastic Darlington crowd.

But the Town defence

had come through some rocky periods, and Darlington, with their fanatical supporters sensing that a shock might be on the cards, raised their game.

After 62 minutes, Paul Futcher was affected by the rash of mistakes. He tried to burst forward, lost possession in midfield, and was then beaten for speed as defender Alec Smith counter-attacked.

Peter Spiring got back to tackle Smith, but the ball ran loose to Stan Webb, who lashed in a tremendous drive from the edge of the penalty box.

The goal lifted Darlington and rattled the Town, and pandemonium broke out six minutes later when Webb headed the winner. It stemmed from a foul by John Ryan on the nippy Eric Young.

The free kick by Jimmy Cochrane found Webb all alone in the danger area, and his header left Barber helpless.

Darlington took command, and as the Town looked more and more rattled, Buckley was booked for a foul on Nattress.

Jimmy Ryan came on for his first taste of first-team soccer this season after 72 minutes as replacement for Andy King. But, although

the Town stormed on to the attack for the last 20 minutes, the goals would not come.

Darlington were forced to defend hectically and Peter Spiring beat goalkeeper Ogley, but saw his shot cleared off the line by Colin Blant.

John Ryan joined the attack and sent a drive over the bar; Spiring had a similar experience and Aston had one shot saved and another in the last minute went narrowly wide.

On chances created, the Town could easily have earned at least a draw, but on the vital matter of taking those chances, it was Darlington's night.

Their boss Peter Madon received the manager of the month award before the game in recognition of his talent in transforming Darlington from a re-election side last season to joint top of the Fourth Division.

He praised his team for their work-rate. But Luton's acting skipper John Faulkner said: "You can hardly believe it, can you? I don't think any of us played as well as we can. We are sick, but the important thing now is to get it out of our system for Saturday."

Match Details

DARLINGTON 2, LUTON TOWN 1

Half-time: 0-1

75/76 (FLC)

TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futcher, Anderson, King (Jim Ryan 74), Chambers; Spiring, Ron Futcher, Aston.

DARLINGTON: Ogley; Nattress, Cochrane, Smith, Blant; Cattrell, Crossan, Young; Holbrook, Sinclair, Webb, Substitute: Rowles, not used.

THE GOALS: Ron Futcher for the Town, opportunist goal after 42 minutes; Eddie Webb for Darlington 62 minutes, Webb again 68 minutes, both goals resulting from Town defensive lapses.

REFEREE: John Rice of Preston, not the most consistent.

ATTENDANCE: 6,601, Darlington's best for two seasons.

BOOKINGS: Ron Futcher for showing dissent and Steve Buckley—his second of the season—for a foul.

ENTERTAINMENT: Great stuff for the home side, but not for Town fans.