

KING'S SPARKLE RUBS OUT EARLY FAILINGS

ALTHOUGH THEY made hard work of it by playing some of their worst football of the season in the first half, the Town picked themselves up after the break to dispose of Blackburn's slight challenge to open the door to a cup run which is badly-needed to swell the ailing finances at Kenilworth Road.

At half-time there was a restive atmosphere in the stands because seldom have the Town wasted the ball as often as they did in the first 45 minutes.

Luckily for them, their off-day coincided with the arrival of one of the worst sides in the Second Division, and Blackburn were unable to take advantage of sloppy distribution of the ball.

By BRIAN SWAIN

Struggling at the wrong end of the league table, Blackburn suffered through lack of confidence when they might easily have gone ahead in the first quarter of an hour when the Town looked as bemused as Sunday League players trying to throw off Saturday night's hangover.

Straight from the kick-off Tony Parkes got through down the Town's right, with the result that the match was only 20 seconds old as Bobby Svarc wasted the first chance by lobbing over the bar.

The Town's defence and midfield went through a nightmare spell in which even when they won the ball they gave it away almost every time to Blackburn men, who didn't know what to do with it.

The visitors should have scored in the 13th minute when Derek Fazackerley pumped a long high pass diagonally across the Town's goal. Jimmy Mullen headed powerfully wide of the far post with Keith Barber beaten.

Two minutes later, it needed a deflection by the defensive wall to stop Fazackerley scoring from a free-kick, after Brian Chambers was penalised for hands on the edge of the penalty area.

At that stage, things looked gloomy for the Town, because although neither side was winning control of the midfield, Blackburn looked capable of worrying the Town defence on the break, and they also were adept at uncompromising defence and long back passes.

But gradually the Town played themselves out of their bad patch. Ron Fletcher headed over from a free-kick by John Aston, then had a shot saved when the ball bobbed at the crucial instant as he took aim.

Chambers, Alan West and Andy King began to get a grin in the middle, and it looked like a very good goal indeed when King netted after 31 minutes after a great run and cross by Alan West. But the linesman had his flag up for offside long before the ball went in, and the "goal" was disallowed.

It seemed to spur on King, who is fast emerging as one of the major discoveries of the season. The Town started to take control after the interval, although Barber had to jump smartly to flip a header by Svarc over the bar. At the other end, West missed a chance that should have been taken after the goalkeeper charged down a shot from Aston.

King and Chambers finally broke the deadlock after 70 minutes with Chambers latching on to an accurate pass through the middle from King. His shot was parried by Jones and Ron Fletcher was too quick for the defenders and scored from the rebound.

At last Blackburn accepted that they were beaten, and six minutes after they vanished without trace after a brilliant run by King. He overcame two attempted fouls as he beat three men and crossed.

Luckily for him, the referee did not see him carry on with his forward charge after releasing the ball—he flattened a Blackburn defender in an obvious mood of angry retaliation.

Chambers collected the ball, took it to the edge of the penalty area, and lighted it perfectly for the sort of goal that is becoming his trade mark.



● THE GOAL THAT WASN'T. Andy King, second from the right, hammers the ball into the net in the 31st minute, with Blackburn goalkeeper Roger Jones well beaten. Referee Brian Daniels signalled a goal, then noticed his linesman was flagging, and they confirmed after the game that the decision was that Jim Husband, wearing number seven above, was offside, and interfering with play.

PICTURES: Harry Dobkin

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2, BLACKBURN ROV 0

Half-time: 0-0

TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Fletcher; Chambers, King, West; Husband, Ron Fletcher, Aston; substitute Paul Price, not needed.

BLACKBURN: Jones; Heaton, Wood, Waddington, Fazackerley; Metcalfe, Oates, Parkes; Hoy, Mullen, Svarc; substitute Wilkinson, not used.

THE GOALS: Ron Fletcher, 70 minutes, after the goalkeeper could do no more than parry a shot by Brian Chambers; Chambers, 76 minutes, great run by Andy King, with a Chambers special, into the top corner, putting the finishing touch.

ATTENDANCE: 11,195—still not enough to make ends meet—but nine of Saturday's 30 cup-ties had even smaller gates.

REFeree: Brian Daniels, Essex: Tried to play the advantage rule to keep the game flowing, but booed when Andy King "scored" in the first half—he gave the goal before checking his linesman, instead of after, and the flag had been up long before the shot went in.

ENTERTAINMENT: Dull in the first half, but picked up in the second when the goals went in. Blackburn contributed very little.



● Ron Fletcher cracks in the Town's first goal. The goalkeeper, on his knees in the centre, had parried a shot from Chambers.