



● Ron Futcher knocks in the goal that put the Town in Easy Street, three up with half an hour to go. It was his seventh goal of the season.

THE VICTORY STROLL

THE TOWN almost strolled to their eighth successive league and cup victory over bottom-of-the-table Portsmouth. They produced a thrilling all-action first half, then went off the boil for a second-half display that baffled everyone.

They even gave away a crackpot goal, and although Portsmouth came back strongly to create enough chances to steal a draw, the Town were full value for their win.

The only criticism is that the hunger for goals dried up after the 3-0 lead had been established in the first hour.

As coach Roy McCrohan pointed out, goal average can be worth a point at the end of the season if the Town are still involved in the promotion chase.

He was particularly incensed by the 71st-minute incident in which Keith Barber and Steve Buckley mucked up a short goal kick. McGuinness stepped between them to pinch the ball and cross into an empty goalmouth for Norman Piper to score.

It was as daft a goal as I have seen since Keith Weller put through his own net in the league game with Leicester City last season.

To his credit Barber refused to let the bloomer affect his concentration. He made two fine saves from Piper as Portsmouth tried to mount a revival in the last 20 minutes.

The Town had taken complete control in the first half. John Aston and Alan West ripped Portsmouth's right flank apart and Chris Lawler, struggling with a stomach upset, was given merciful relief when he was substituted at half-time.

By then the match was over as a contest. After eight minutes, a clearance by Barber set up the prelude to the first goal. Buckley knocked Barber's long kick forward to Ron Futcher and his shot from an angle went for a corner off Went.

West took the kick, an inswinger to the far post, and John Faulkner soared to head in his first goal of the season.

The second goal was a gem, both in creation and execution. West took a throw-in on the Town's left, and waited just long enough for Aston to make a run away from goal and across the face of the penalty area.

Chased by two defenders, the winger knocked the ball across to Jim Husband on the far side of the penalty box. He slipped it back again, and with Pompey's

Town nearly made to pay for taking it too easy

REPORT BY BRIAN SWAIN PICTURES: RON PURVES

bemused defence facing all ways Andy King turned and smacked the ball on the volley into the net.

He had cracked a similar shot narrowly wide a couple of minutes earlier, and his goal underlined the potential of a lad who has come up through the ranks from local soccer into the big-time.

In defence, the Town carried all the answers to the modest questions asked by Pompey before the interval. Faulkner and Paul Futcher looked like giants playing against pygmies, and Buckley and John Ryan were not far behind.

Their only worrying moment before the interval was when George Graham, who used to be a very good player, flicked a back-header at goal from a corner, and Barber had to punch the ball to safety.

The Town seemed to lose some of their urgency

after the break, and Barber had to make a desperate save outside his own area to stop Piper getting through.

But the game was apparently wrapped up completely after 58 minutes when King set off on a run which took him past the lumbering, balding Reynolds, before sending Jimmy Husband through.

Husband, needing a goal to boost his confidence, saw his shot parried by Lloyd, but Ron Futcher was first to the rebound and put the Town three up.

The Oak Road ends were singing a forecast that the Town are going to win the league, but Portsmouth came back. Graham, who had spent most of the first half moaning loud complaints when he and his colleagues made mistakes, suddenly recaptured some of his skills.

He was allowed space to

act as a distribution centre and link between defence and attack, and some of his passes left the Town's mid-field stranded.

Even so, Portsmouth rarely looked dangerous until they were given their gift goal. But from then on, the Town were second best.

Barber flew off his line to make a smart catch to cut out a cross by Mellows, and then made two good saves in the last five minutes from Piper.

And Pompey manager Ian St John rammed home the vital message about over-confidence at the end of the game. He blamed his own defence for slack covering in the first half, then added: "We came into it towards the end, and on chances created we could easily have had a draw."

They could indeed. But it would have been a travesty.



● ANDY KING—scored a super-goal.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 3, PORTSMOUTH 1

Half-time: 2-0

TOWN: Barber; John Ryan, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futcher; Chambers, King, West; Husband, Ron Futcher, Aston. Sub: Jim Ryan, not needed.

PORTSMOUTH: Lloyd; Lawler (Wilson, second half), Roberts, Went, Cahill; Mellows, Graham, Reynolds; McGuinness, Piper, Eames.

THE GOALS: John Faulkner, his first of the season, for the Town, eight minutes, towering header from a corner by Alan West; Andy King, 37 minutes, made by the combination of West, John Aston and Jim Husband; Ron Futcher, 58 minutes, after Husband's shot half saved by Lloyd; Norman Piper for Pompey, 71 minutes, a barmy gift from Keith Barber and Steve Buckley.

ATTENDANCE: 10,464. It looked bigger, and sounded bigger. Pity it wasn't.

REFEREE: Derek Richardson, Blackburn. A lot of people disagreed with some of his decisions, including his own linesmen.

ENTERTAINMENT: Beginning to settle into a regular pattern at home: good stuff for the first hour or so, then degenerated rapidly.

Division II Review

THE REST of the results in the Second Division were unkind to the Town, with not a single team above them losing. But the Town made up a little ground on two of the promotion contenders, Southampton and Bolton, who met at The Dell and drew 0-0.

Although Bolton were happier with

the result than the Saints, it cost the Lancashire club second place.

Bristol City are now second, two points behind Sunderland, and ahead of Bolton on goal average. City took both points in their home game with Blackburn thanks to a goal after six minutes by Mann. City and Bolton are now five points ahead of the Town, although the Town have a game in hand over City — the away game with Bolton which was postponed a week last Saturday.

Of the other teams trying to push through into the top three positions, Notts County won 2-1 at Carlisle, with the winner being scored in the last minute; West Brom beat strugglers York 1-0 away; and Oldham squeezed through by a similar margin at home to Blackpool.

Bristol Rovers slumped again, beaten 3-0 at The Valley where Derek Hales scored twice to end a long lean spell.

Fulham seem to have blown their chance of promotion. John Mitchell scored at Craven Cottage, but Foley notched an equaliser for Oxford ten minutes from time.

Fewer than 7,000 people saw that game.

The Town's gate of 10,464 was disappointing, and below subsistence level. Sunderland had the biggest attendance in the Division, with 29,737 watching their 2-1 victory over Plymouth.

At the other end, only 3,876 turned up to see Orient beat Hull 1-0, the East London club's lowest gate for seven years.

THE LEADERS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Sunderland	26	16	4	6	41	22	36
Bristol City	26	13	8	5	43	21	34
Bolton	25	13	8	4	41	24	34
Notts Co	26	13	6	7	36	23	32
West Brom	26	10	10	6	25	24	30
Oldham	26	12	6	8	38	38	30
Southampton	24	13	3	8	43	29	29
LUTON TN	25	12	5	8	37	26	29



● John Faulkner rises above the rest to head the Town into the lead.