



● **RYAN'S GOAL:** John Ryan, second from right, thumps in the right foot shot that went through the Charlton defensive wall to put the Town ahead.

DREARY FAILURE COSTS A HOME POINT

TOWN BOSS Harry Haslam was still defiantly insisting after Saturday's game that it is possible for First Division football to be here next season. Mathematically, and with a couple of big shocks thrown in, he's right.

But on the evidence of the last two games, with a dropped home point following a defeat at Orient, the Town are not First Division material.

The sad thing about Saturday's draw with Charlton was that the Londoners were rubbish. The Town had nearly nothing to beat, and they couldn't beat it.

Some of the players found an instant excuse for taking part in a dreary match: the pitch was hard and the ball bounced all ways on a windy afternoon.

But that doesn't explain the recurring instances when there was a lack of aggression in some departments. Only when they went back to

Report by BRIAN SWAIN
Pictures by HARRY DOBKIN

using short passes did the Town look like the team they can be.

But neither side looked very strong in attack, with Steve Buckley producing the most menacing shots for the Town before the first goal arrived in the 37th minute.

And even that was the result of a mistake.

Charlton goalkeeper Jess Wood had shown signs of nervousness every time Ron Fletcher went near him, and referee Ralph Lee ruled the keeper had taken more than four steps in an attempt to get round Fletcher to clear the ball.

Charlton's defenders were incensed, certain that Fletcher should have been penalised for obstruction and tempers were still simmering when Tony Young was booked for encroaching nearer than ten yards as Alan West prepared to take the indirect free kick in the box.

West and John Ryan kept cool, and Wood was left stranded as Ryan met his skipper's short free kick with a tremendous drive into the net.

I hoped then that the Town would settle down to take control. But although individually they were the better ball players, they could not win the midfield battle.

A dreary stalemate set in, and Charlton gave warning of what was to come when Derek Hales, although well guarded by Paul Price and Paul Fletcher, produced a shot on the turn which Keith Barber had to save with the palms of his hands.

The Town came back with the best move of the game. Andy King fed Lil Fuccillo on the left flank, near the half-way line.

Fuccillo burst forward, and as he did so Buckley went on a dummy run down the wing. A defender chose to go with Buckley, and Fuccillo saw the gap, and hit a low shot through it.

Unluckily for him, the ball bent the wrong way and went narrowly wide of the far post. It deserved



● **SAVE OF THE SEASON:** Keith Barber flings himself across goal to pull off a wonder-save and stop a free-kick from Bob Curtis reaching the top corner of the net.

better, and would have been a goal to remember.

Another turning point should have come in the 69th minute, when Keith Barber pulled off the best save I have ever seen him make, flying through the air to knock out a free kick by Curtis, then dropping on the ball before Hales could get to it.

It was brilliant, but the Town failed to raise their game, and 12 minutes from time Hales salvaged a point after Flanagan and Hunt worked their way down the Town's right.

Barber and his nearest defenders were all caught going to their right as Flanagan crossed accurately, and Hales scored from close range.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, CHARLTON 1
Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Barber; Ryan, Buckley, Price, Paul Fletcher; Fuccillo, King, West; Husband, Ron Fletcher, Aston. Sub: Spiring, not used.

CHARLTON: Wood; Berry, David Young, Giles, Curtis (Bowman 71 minutes); Tony Young, Powell, Peacock; Hales, Flanagan, Hunt.

THE GOALS: John Ryan for the Town, 39 minutes, tremendous drive after short free kick in the penalty area by Alan West; Derek Hales for Charlton, 78 minutes, after Flanagan and Hunt opened up the Town's right flank.

REFEREE: Ralph Lee, Cheadle, Cheshire. Did Charlton no favours.

BOOKING: Tony Young, for not retreating ten yards at the indirect free kick which led to the Town's goal.

ATTENDANCE: 9,947. Pathetic — but six games in the Second Division attracted lower attendances.

ENTERTAINMENT: Needs to be better than this was to bring back the missing supporters.