

HAPPY FANS SALUTE THE SHOESTRING SURVIVORS

Young players give hope for the future

By BRIAN SWAIN, Sports Editor

AS THE TOWN reached the end of a season in which the Club refused to lay down and die from financial starvation, the young supporters turned the final day into an amazing occasion, swamping the pitch and forcing manager Harry Haslam to take a bow and an ovation that is normally reserved for title-winners.

They desperately want success—but they are happy enough to accept this season's end with the realisation that winning the battle for survival was the first priority which now seems to have been accomplished.

And who could disbelieve the manager when he tried to tell the fans, above their chanting, that next year Luton Town will be up there fighting, looking for promotion.

The Club's hopes now rest largely on the shoulders of youth and inexperience, with a little sprinkling of older players.

The combination was too much for Blackpool, whose performance had "end of season" written all over it once Ron Futchler had collected the first goal.

Mr Haslam is too much of a realist to believe that the side which ended the season will be good enough to win promotion next year; but the message that shone out was that the youngsters are on their way, and that Luton Town, having fought to preserve its present, now has a bright future as well.

Of the 11 players on the pitch on Saturday, only Keith Barber, Brian Chambers, Jim Husband and Alan West are seasoned campaigners with long experience.

IN THE WINGS

The best is yet to come from the other seven—and there are still more youngsters waiting in the wings.

The manager used Saturday to give a debut to 16-year-old Gary Jones in the number 5 shirt. His nerves showed through at times, but he came out of the 90 minutes with credit: Mick Walsh, Blackpool's most dangerous player,

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 3, BLACKPOOL 0

Half-time: 2-0

TOWN: Barber; Price, Buckley, Jones, Paul Futchler; Fuccillo, Chambers, West; Husband, Ron Futchler, Hill. Sub: John Ryan, not needed.

BLACKPOOL: Wood; Hatton, Hart, Suddaby, Harrison; Bentley, Evanson (McEwan, 71 mins), Suddick, Ronson; Walsh, Ainscow.

THE GOALS: Ron Futchler twice, 20 minutes, header from Buckley's cross, and 42 minutes after through-ball by Fuccillo; Fuccillo, 71 minutes, bender from edge of penalty area.

REFEREE: Clive Thomas, Treorchy: no-one gave him any bother in his warm-up for Wembley on Saturday.

ENTERTAINMENT: Good stuff for the last game of the season.

ATTENDANCE: 8,757, with the fans paying an emotional tribute to Harry Haslam at the end.

failed to get on to the score-sheet.

He threatened to do so twice: the first time Barber produced a very good save, and the second time Steve Buckley cleared off the line.

But Blackpool were on their way out from the

20th minute, when Ron Futchler headed in a lob by Buckley. The wind, gusty and swirling, helped to deceive Blackpool goalkeeper Wood.

The Town played with Ron Futchler and Husband sharing the forward weight,

with any one of four mid-field players going through in support, and West, Chambers, Lil Fuccillo and Ricky Hill all played their part in outplaying Blackpool in the middle of the park.

Hill, playing his first full game after his dramatic debut as sub five days previously, showed some welcome fire and enthusiasm in his breaks forward, and also produced a variety of passes.

INSTINCTIVE

He seems to have an instinctive ability to know when to knock off a short pass, when to hammer a long one, and when to chip the ball into space for one of his team-mates.

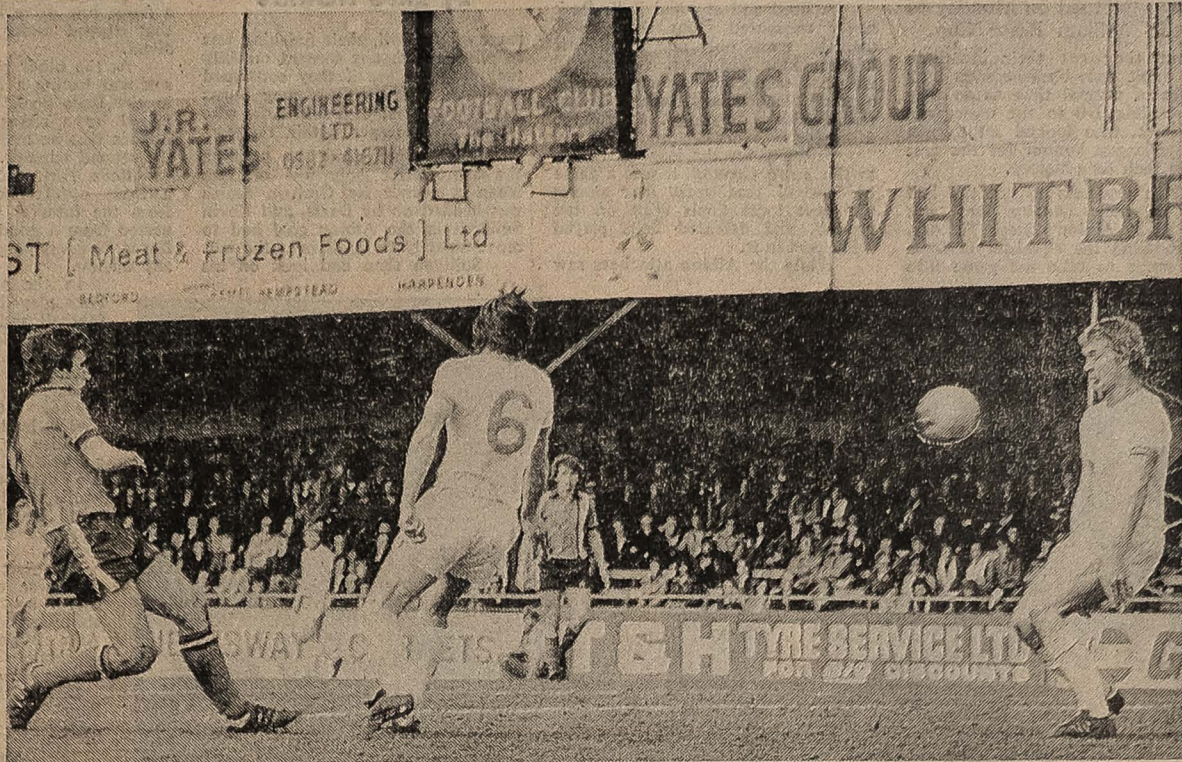
Barber saved well from Ainscow after he had got round Jones, but with Buckley rampaging down the left wing and the fans urging on every attack, Blackpool were always second best.

Fuccillo, with an accurate through-ball, laid on Ron Futchler's second goal three minutes before the interval.

FINAL GOAL

Fuccillo had two shots which went narrowly wide, put his own goal in jeopardy with a barmy lofted back-pass, then compensated by scoring the Town's last goal of the season. A cross by Buckley was only partly cleared, and Fuccillo neatly bent a shot from 20 yards into the net off Wood's right-hand post.

It all added up to better entertainment than we might have expected from two teams with nothing to play for beyond personal pride and professional dignity. And, better still, it left most of us with a feeling of hope for next season.



● LAST GOAL OF THE SEASON: Lil Fuccillo, one of the teenagers who have accepted responsibility after stars had to be sold, hammers in the Town's third goal, their 61st of the season.



● HEADS I WIN: Ron Futchler soars high to beat a challenge by Blackpool defender Peter Suddaby to score the Town's first goal. Goalkeeper George Wood tried to punch clear after being caught in two minds as the strong wind blew Steve Buckley's lob into the goalmouth after it had looked as though the ball would go out of play.

— Pictures by RON PURVES