



● THE MOMENT OF CHEER: Jim Husband blasts in the Town's equaliser, with white-shirted John Aston and Sunderland defenders Malone and Clarke watching.

BARBER'S NIGHTMARE IS A CUP KILLER



● ALAN WEST

Skipper is back

SKIPPER Alan West and striker Ron Fletcher returned to football in the Town's colours last night when they were involved in a Football Combination side which met Southampton Reserves at Kenilworth Road.

Jim Ryan is also back from America, and went straight into the first team squad when he was sub at Sunderland. He played at the last five minutes of the match at Roker Park in place of John Faulkner, who collected a knee injury.

Faulkner, who has been deputising as skipper while West has been away, expects to be fit for Saturday's match with Nottingham Forest at Kenilworth Road. He is likely to be marking an old friend—Barry Butlin, sold to Forest for £120,000 two years ago.

Manager Harry Haslam was waiting to see last night's reserve match before deciding whether or not to make changes in the side to meet Forest.

Dixie Deans is having treatment for a badly bruised foot. The injury made him doubtful for the Sunderland match, and Ron Fletcher was called up to stand by as replacement.

In the event, a day after flying back home from America, he made the 500-mile return trip to Roker Park to be a spectator.

He and West are both eager to get back into the league side. Said Ron: "I enjoyed my football in America, and I think it has done me good. It's quickened me up a bit."

The Manager is sleeping on it before deciding on his team for Saturday. Despite the result at Sunderland, the team played some great football, and the same side was positively brilliant at Burnley. Paul Fletcher rated that performance as the best team display he has ever seen.

ONE MAN'S nightmare ended the Town's hopes of glory and money-spinning gates in the Football League Cup. At Roker Park on Tuesday night they gave as good as they got in every department against First Division Sunderland—except between the goal-posts.

There, the hapless Keith Barber, player of the year last season, made two dreadful mistakes which were gratefully punished by a Sunderland side that deserved no more than a draw.

Barber's judgment had also been questionable,

though to a lesser degree, when Sunderland scored the first of their three goals.

Town manager Harry

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League Cup defeat at the first hurdle—BRIAN SWAIN reports

Match Details

SUNDERLAND 3, LUTON TOWN 1
Half-time: 3-1

TOWN: Barber; Price, Buckley, Faulkner (Ryan, 85 minutes); Fletcher; Chambers, Hill, Fucillo; Husband, Deans, Aston.

SUNDERLAND: Montgomery; Malone, Bolton, Clarke, Moncur; Towers, Kerr, Train; Robson, Holden, Hughes. Sub: Roy Greenwood, not used.

THE GOALS: Hughes for Sunderland, 24 minutes, after neat set piece, angled shot deflected by Chambers between Barber and near post; Jim Husband, 26 minutes, after Hill headed on a cross by Price; Hughes, 38 minutes, shot which Barber let under his body; Robson, 42 minutes, another gift after Barber advanced but failed to collect the ball.

REFEREE: Pat Partridge, Cockfield, Durham; missed little, but always kept the game flowing if advantage could be played.

ATTENDANCE: 22,390: will probably be the biggest gate at any Town match this season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Better than the score-line would suggest, with the Town contributing as much as Sunderland and worth at least a draw except for goal-keeping errors.

Haslam put on his usual smiling face at the after-match inquest with reporters "If you can't take the defeats you shouldn't be in the game," he said.

"But I feel sorry for the lads. They put it all together again, played well, and then lost because of mistakes."

"Keith Barber is sick about it, but that's the way it goes in football. Obviously we are disappointed to have lost, but we proved again that we can play some good stuff."

I agree with those sentiments, although I felt the team did not reach the high peak of form it had shown at Burnley on Saturday. Sunderland made it more of a contest in mid-field.

But Sunderland would have had no complaints if they had been brought back to Kenilworth Road for a replay. The Town might easily have been 4-1 up in the first 20 minutes.

Jim Husband, full of running and quick off the mark, was caught narrowly offside as he shot inches wide from a pass by Price, then blazed a 25-yard shot

over after good work by Ricky Hill.

Lil Fucillo put an 18-yarder just over, and Dixie Deans produced a right-foot bender which forced Montgomery to a full-length save.

But with no attacker playing down the right flank, Sunderland found space on that side of the field to put pressure on the Town's defence, with full-back Holden making a series of overlapping runs.

Paul Price fouled him on one, which brought the first goal, after 24 minutes. Hughes shaped to take the kick, ten yards outside the Town's penalty area, but ran over the ball.

He kept running, into the inside-left position, and Bolton took the kick, placing the ball at the feet of Hughes. By then he was about a yard from the by-line, near the edge of the penalty area.

He tried to cross hard and low into the middle. Barber committed himself, and the ball took a deflec-

tion off Brian Chambers and went into the net between Barber and the near post.

The doubt about Barber's technique was whether or not he had sold himself too soon. From my vantage point in the stand, I thought it was bad luck, with the deflection giving Sunderland a lead they did not really deserve.

BEST GOAL

Within two minutes that question mark looked like being forgotten, because the Town picked themselves up and hit back with the best goal of the game.

Paul Price, who had another splendid match along with the rest of the Town defence, charged down the right wing, and crossed from near the corner flag.

Hill, who looks better with every game, beat Moncur in the air to knock the ball down, and Husband lashed it into the net from near the penalty spot.

At that moment, I felt that the Town had beaten Sunderland's threat, and would go on to hold them to a draw at least.

But then came two vital mistakes in the space of four minutes. Hughes scored his second goal in

the 38th minute with a low shot on the turn. Barber got down to it, but the ball went beneath his body and trickled over the line before he grabbed it at the second attempt.

Three minutes before the interval the contest was over. A through-ball was hit to the angle of the Town's penalty area, and there was no danger as Barber ran out to collect it, with Paul Fletcher shielding the ball from Hughes and Kerr.

They gave up hope of reaching the ball first, until Barber bent down, fumbled the ball, and lost possession. Hughes stepped in, made a short square pass, and Robson, scarcely able to believe his luck, shot into the empty net from 18 yards.

ANTI-CLIMAX

The second half was all anti-climax. The Town produced only one real threat, in the 50th minute, when Deans headed the ball into the centre and Husband connected with a tremendous volley.

Jim Montgomery made an equally good reflex save to knock the ball up and away, and from then on Sunderland settled to slow the game down, retain possession whenever possible, and make the most of their good fortune.



● Sunderland goalkeeper Jim Montgomery stretches to his fingertips to flick the ball away as Dixie Deans rises to try to head for goal.