



HARRY BLOWS HIS TOP OVER REFEREE

TOWN MANAGER Harry Haslam started 1977 by breaking his resolve to be nice to referees. The New Year was just 17 hours old when David Lloyd from Fernhill Heath in Worcestershire was under fire from the Town boss and his players.

They were fuming at decisions made by Mr Lloyd during the game at Bristol. Said Mr Haslam: "I've been critical of refereeing standards in recent months and I had made up my mind not

to say anything more. But I couldn't keep quiet about that referee's performance. I told him what I thought.

"He was hopeless. He didn't keep up with play; he missed two blatant penalties and when he did see an offence in the box he was chicken.

"Some of his decisions were out of this world. And if people think I am going on too much about referees it's only because I see things on the field that force me to speak out.

"A manager stands or falls by his team's results. You have to learn to take defeat. But it knocks you sick

when you work hard all week but see the whole lot lost because of one man's mistakes."

Two of Mr Lloyd's errors came within a minute of each other, and turned out to be the turning point of the match against Bristol Rovers.

The Town were well on top when Jim Ryan was tackled from behind by full-back Bater as he tried to attack the goal. Even Bristol supporters thought it was a penalty, but Mr Lloyd didn't. The ball went for a corner, and when it was hit back into the box Warboys controlled it with his hand.

Again, most people thought it was a penalty, but the referee ignored all appeals, and while the Town players lost concentration over it, Rovers broke away to score the winner.

Earlier Town skipper Alan West had been booked for dissent after the Town's man of the match Paul Futcher had been penalised for a tackle that seemed perfectly fair.

Said the Town manager:

"Part of the game is penalties, and the making of decisions. There were two that the referee ignored. They were both blatant, and Bristol people came to me after the game and admitted that both should have been given.

"How could I come away and not say anything? He chickened out in the box—I wonder if he would have done the same if the incidents had been in our penalty box?"

The Football League is operating a new system this season of allocating referees to matches. They confine appointments to areas, to avoid having referees make long expensive journeys.

"This area selection system is becoming scandalous," said the Town manager. "We'd rather pay higher expenses and have good referees than suffer the way we have done this season.

"And I should think referees ought to agree with that. This season we have had a County Durham ref at Sunderland, a Yorkshire referee at Hull and a Lancashire ref at Blackburn.

"Those blokes were put in a bad position before the games started — decisions would be criticised whichever way they went. The sooner we get rid of area selection the better."

Striking failures cost points at Bristol

THE HARSH words about the pathetic performance of referee David Lloyd at Eastville on Saturday came close to clouding the other major reason for the Town going down to a defeat they scarcely deserved against Bristol Rovers.

For although he missed two penalties, the Town missed chances, and should have had the points in the bag long before Mr Lloyd's clangers threw them out of their stride.

For 50 minutes the Town had the measure of the home side. Without reaching the heights they had achieved against Chelsea, they looked much too fluent for the Rovers.

But with no-one capable of sticking the ball into the back of the net, all the good work was wasted, and in the end the Town could blame themselves as much as the referee for their defeat.

Ron Futcher spurned two of the best opportunities, both in the first half. He escaped his marking to get on the end of a far post cross by Paul Price and headed wide, and later blasted a volley wide from a good position after a cross by Steve Buckley.

Ron Futcher is a bit of a puzzle these days. In the build-up of attacks he looks far better than he did before he went to America last summer. He looks a more complete footballer, with more ideas than he used to have.

But the close control is not always there, and he hasn't scored since November. He certainly should have had a couple at Bristol.

In addition to those chances, Lil Fuccillo, who had a very quiet game, let one slip through pushing the ball too far ahead when he was going through on his own, and John Faulkner hit the bar with a close-range header when he ought to have scored after a corner by Chambers.

Jim Ryan curled a corner against the bar, and Price beat goalkeeper Eadie with a header from a corner only to see Bater clear off the line.

The Rovers looked no more than workmanlike, but the Town fell apart in

the vital 53rd minute.

I have no doubt at all that Ryan was fouled by Bater, who had been booked earlier for a similar foul on Fuccillo.

All the Town got was a corner, and when the ball was hammered into the penalty area from it Warboys controlled it with his hand. I was one of many who saw it, but again the referee apparently didn't.

The Town's agitation over that decision probably cost them the match. Warboys handled then booted the ball downfield. It ran via Fearnley to Hamilton, and the long cross produced a scramble in the Town's goalmouth.

Milija Aleksic blocked two shots, but the ball ran kindly for Peter Aitken and he stabbed it into the net from close range.

The Town had been showing signs of fading before that, but the goal knocked the last signs of confidence from their play.

The conditions were not helpful, with cold rain blowing across the pitch throughout the game. The midfield department failed to warm up appreciably. Chambers was the pick of them, and got through into good attacking positions.

At least his shots were on target, but they also went straight to Eadie more often than not. Fuccillo and Alan West were disappointing, and the Town skipper was booked for dissent after Paul Futcher was pulled up harshly.

The Town's young sweeper stood head and shoulders above everyone else on the pitch, and the defence in general looked capable and strong.

The league table is beginning to show the Town's problem — the defence compares favourably with most, but the goals are not coming regularly enough.

Brian Swain
reports
on the
Town's
start
to 1977

BRISTOL DETAILS

BRISTOL ROVERS 1, LUTON TOWN 0

Half-time: 0-0

Brian Swain's Verdict: ★ ★

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Futcher; Chambers, Fuccillo, West; Husband, Ron Futcher, Ryan. Sub: Hill, not used.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Eadie; Bater, Parsons, Taylor, Aitken; Williams, Stephens, Staniforth; Fearnley, Warboys, Hamilton. Sub: Evans, not used.

THE GOAL: Aitken, 53 minutes, while Town were seething and caught on the break a few seconds after two penalties were missed by the ref.

REFEREE: David Lloyd, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire. Only needed the specs to be like Harold Lloyd.

ATTENDANCE: 7,185—not bad for a cold and wet day.

ENTERTAINMENT: The Town provided most of it in the first half, but failed to come up with the final punch.

BOOKINGS: Alan West for dissent, after one of the ref's many mistakes; Bater for Rovers for his second bad tackle on Fuccillo.