

# LEAGUE LEADERS WIN

## BATTLE OF WITS

THE SECOND of two away games seen by Manager Harry Haslam as a pointer to the Town's promotion chances saw them go down to their second consecutive league defeat, at Burnden Park.

Division Two leaders Bolton came back after the Town took an early lead, and although their manager praised the Town's performance the Luton supporters could have few complaints about the result.

The Town had prepared well, with the result that neither forward line was able to create many chances. But what was lacking in the way of goalmouth excitement was made up for by the intriguing battle for supremacy in midfield.

The Town did not play as well as they can do—they were not as inventive or as incisive as they had been against Manchester City at Kenilworth Road.

And at the Burnden Park talk-in

Report by  
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after the Bolton match, a lot of the comments took me back to City manager Tony Book's views.

I had asked him how the Town would fare if they did win promotion. His summing up was that the Second Division was wide open and that the Town could easily be in the top three at the end of the season.

"But," he added, "if you do get to the First Division you will have to go out and buy at least two new players."

I thought the Bolton performance justified that verdict by a First Division manager.

The Town looked good at the back except for the inability to keep winger Willie Morgan out of the game. He didn't get much change out of Steve Buckley, but always looked dangerous when he concentrated his attentions on the other flank.

Paul Price found him too much of a handful, and Morgan was the man who turned the match around.

The Town got off to a smooth start. In their very first attack they put together a passing movement that took the ball from the right-back position to the left-wing, via Price, Jim Husband, Alan West, Lil Fuccillo, Gary Heale and back to West.

The skipper laid the ball back to Buckley, who hammered in an angled drive from the inside-left position, about ten yards outside the penalty area.

The ball was shifting at some speed and Ron Fletcher bent low to deflect its course just enough to deceive goalkeeper Jim McDonagh. Bolton's supporters groaned as McDonagh covered it, but then let the ball go underneath his body into the net.

Bolton started to get ragged after that, with the Town's midfield making it an even central battle, and John Faulkner and Paul Fletcher superb in defence.



● Jim Husband watches goalkeeper McDonagh allow Ron Fletcher's header to pass under him into the net for the Town's goal at Burnden Park.

But Bolton picked up the pace in the second half, and within seven minutes of the restart Milija Aleksic made a mistake on a par with McDonagh's and allowed a hook shot by Morgan to pass through his hands and over the line.

For the first time Bolton and their fans believed in the possibility of victory and the Town began to struggle under increasing pressure.

Ricky Hill was unable to find the opportunity for the brilliant constructive play he can produce, and fell short of what was needed in the way of winning the ball as Bolton raised the pace.

The Town's forward threats all but vanished, with Husband and Gary Heale swamped on the flanks. Ron Fletcher had to struggle on his own too often, but played better than he had done in recent games without much support.

Peter Reid almost put Bolton ahead when he broke through on the Town's right, but after his shot beat Aleksic, Neil Whatmore poked the ball wide of the empty net thanks to the presence of Faulkner, who was sticking closer than the number on Whatmore's back.

The essential difference was that Bolton were able to put defenders forward on the flanks to back up attacks, while the Town's only priority was to keep out the fast-moving raids that developed continually.

It was a tremendous battle of wits and positional play, and it looked as though the Town would get through for the point they badly needed.

They were remarkably cool under pressure, but eight minutes from time Bolton's frustration was eased when Frank Worthington, a £90,000 buy from Leicester City, headed his fifth goal in six games.

Again the damage was done down the Town's right, and Morgan was allowed too much space to bang over a high cross. Worthington rose above a scrum of players to send a header looping across the goal and into the far corner.

Even then the Town went close to snatching an equaliser. Bolton thought they had the game wrapped up, and were shutting up shop for the last five minutes.

They were cut apart down the middle in the 87th minute with Hill and Ron Fletcher exchanging quick passes, and Hill's drive was swinging wide of McDonagh towards the corner of the net until the Bolton goalkeeper compensated for his earlier error by flinging himself to his right to make a good save.

## Match Details

**BOLTON 2, LUTON TOWN 1**

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Buckley, Faulkner, Paul Fletcher; West, Hill, Fuccillo; Husband, Ron Fletcher, Heale. Sub: McNichol, not used.

BOLTON WANDERERS: McDonagh; Nicholson, Dunne, Walsh, Allardyce; Greaves, Train, Reid; Morgan, Whatmore, Worthington. Sub: Jones, not used.

THE GOALS: Ron Fletcher for the Town, after seven minutes; header deflecting Steve Buckley's drive straight through goalkeeper McDonagh; Willie Morgan for Bolton, 52 minutes, hook shot through the hands of Milija Aleksic; Frank Worthington for Bolton, 82 minutes, header after Morgan's cross from left to the far post.

ATTENDANCE: 20,113, with Luton supporters making their voices heard well.

REFEREE: George Courtney, Spennymoor: neither side had any complaints about his handling of the game and the way he kept it moving.

ENTERTAINMENT: Short on goalmouth thrills and excitement, but a fascinating duel between two sides who had done their homework well and very nearly cancelled each other out. On the day Bolton deserved to win.