

RELEGATION FIGHTERS FIND AN EASY TOUCH

Haslam admits: 'We were just terrible'

By Brian Swain, Sports Editor

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SOME STRAIGHT talking has been going on at Kenilworth Road this week following the double shock of Saturday's events. First came a pathetic performance on the field as the Town side meekly caved in to Burnley, who are bottom of the Second Division.

Then came the bombshell that Manager Harry Haslam was under the threat of the sack, with the recent run of only two points taken from the last 14 adding ammunition to any directors who might be gunning for Haslam.

Town chairman Denis Mortimer acted quickly to dispel rumours that Haslam was about to be chopped, and the Manager now badly needs to instil fresh confidence into his players for Saturday's tough assignment at The Dell.

If the performance against Burnley is a genuine yardstick, Southampton are home and dry. But thank goodness glorious uncertainties are what make football the game it is.

The point was made by a subdued Haslam after Saturday's flop against a side which had previously lost all eight of its away games.

"Terrible, wasn't it?" said Haslam. "But how do you work it out? We played some marvellous stuff at Sunderland and looked as though we had turned the corner. Then this happens: We had no cover in defence, the midfield men didn't get into it, and when we created chances we didn't put them away."

"The players are as baffled as I am. They knew they were doing it wrong, but didn't seem to be able to do anything about it."

"Certainly Burnley overcame the conditions better than we did for the first hour or so. They didn't mess about — they knocked the ball over the top and then ran for it, and Steve Kindon killed us."

"We've no excuses — we knew what Kindon could do, and our covering let us down. The last time he played against us was for Wolves, and he didn't get a kick that time."

Burnley boss Harry Potts rates Kindon the fastest man in football, and he seemed to justify that description with acceleration that left Jim McNichol standing on a frost-hardened surface.

With almost every member of the Town team playing below par, Peter Noble ruled the midfield and Kindon's

**'We won't sack
the manager'
—SportsNews 6**

speed cut through the Town's back four with impressive power.

One of his bursts was so quick that McNichol's attempt to pull him down from behind was outstripped.

The Town's only slightly bright note was that Phil Boersma returned after an eight-game absence, and showed a couple of times that he could leave Keith Newton stranded and push over accurate crosses from the left wing.

In the early cut and thrust both sides had half-chances, and full-back Ian Brennan hit a post after Burnley had won a corner. At the other end Alan Stevenson made a good save after Ron Fletcher got through from Boersma's pass and later Fletcher pulled a shot wide after Boersma had made another opening.

Burnley looked more menacing and went ahead when Brian Hall was unmarked in the penalty area to collect a headed pass by Kindon and score with ease.

The Town then went through a truly awful patch, but picked themselves up in the last minute of the first half, only for Ron Fletcher to put another chance wide and Alan West to slam one over the bar. Again both opportunities were created by Boersma.

For the first five minutes after the break the Town kept up the pressure with West shooting wide, Ricky Hill hitting the roof of the Oak Road stand and Jim Husband knocking another chance off target.

But then Burnley put the knife in, with a long headed clearance out of defence. Kindon set off with the grace of a champion greyhound, outstripped McNichol and placed his shot accurately as Milija Aleksic tried to cut down the angle.

It was a brilliant goal against a non-existent defence and the Town's wretched display drew jeers of "What a load of rubbish" from the terraces.

Not until the final ten minutes did Burnley face a fight. With 11 minutes to go the Town pulled one back when Hill scored from the edge of the box after Boersma put Steve Buckley away for a rare overlap down the left wing.

Within a minute, Buckley went through again and swerved a vicious 25-yarder just over the bar. And the equaliser might have come in the 87th minute when a corner by West was headed on by Paul Price and Fletcher hooked the ball wide from five yards.

On the run of play it would have been an equaliser the Town did not deserve.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, BURNLEY 2

Half-time: 0-1

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

BURNLEY: Stevenson; Newton, Brennan, Thomson, Rodaway; Noble, Ingham, Hall, Morley; Fletcher, Kindon. Sub: Cochrane, not used.

THE GOALS: Brian Hall for Burnley, 29 minutes, unmarked in the box to take advantage of a headed pass by Steve Kindon; Kindon for Burnley, 50 minutes, using his speed on the break, with the Town defence caught cold upfield; Ricky Hill for the Town, 79 minutes, after Steve Buckley's centre was half-cleared to the edge of the box.

REFEREE: David Biddle, Bristol — played considerably better than most of the Town team.

BOOKING: Ron Fletcher for a foul on Tony Morley — his fourth of the season, and the next one is likely to mean a three-match ban.

ATTENDANCE: 6,921, lowest of the season on a bitterly cold day, but four gates in the Second Division were even smaller.

ENTERTAINMENT: Terrible for Town fans, with Burnley well worth their first away points of the season. The only bright spot was the Town's revival in the last ten minutes.