

Blackpool buried by three in the last 13 minutes

YOU COULD almost feel the relief and pleasure emanating from David Pleat at the end of Saturday's game after his much-criticised team gave him the sort of professional performance he had demanded.

Blackpool, who once threatened to play a major role in the promotion battle, were cast adrift as the Town poured in three goals in a stunning last 13 minutes.

And even if one game doesn't make or break a team, it was still a highly satisfying day for Town supporters, and for the manager still gingerly picking his way through the pitfalls of the Football League.

In his column in the Luton News last week Mr Pleat had called on his team to wipe out the unhappy memories of Fulham and make Blackpool catch the backlash.

In Saturday's match programme he commented darkly about players who didn't give 100 per cent effort on the pitch, and talked of an apathetic approach and lack of responsibility by some of them.

But by five o'clock it was Blackpool

Report by
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boss Jimmy Meadows who was bemoaning his luck at having a team which didn't go into the game with the right attitude.

They had been too complacent, he said. They might even have taken the field believing that Luton Town were easy meat.

Perhaps so. But more to the point, as Pleat commented: "We showed the right attitude. There was good team spirit, and players were working for each other."

He had dropped Graham Jones from midfield, to revert to the proven trio of Ricky Hill, Alan West and Lil Fuccillo, who were the hub of the Town team in its early season success.

They weren't as good as they can be, but still more than good enough to win control of the midfield even though Blackpool had four men engaged in that department.

Hill particularly kept Blackpool on tenterhooks, especially in the first half when the Town played their best football.

His shot in the first 15 seconds whistled past a post with Bob Ward not seeing the ball until it bounced back off the railings, and soon afterwards a thunderbolt drive beat the keeper again but bounced clear off the bar.

Fuccillo and Phil Boersma worked well down the left flank, and Brian Stein needed careful watching down the right, and at half-time Blackpool were grate-

ful to be only one goal behind.

It was made down the left, with Ron Futchter and John Faulkner sending headers across the goal-mouth after a free kick before Alan West dived in to score with a close-range header.

Blackpool's frustration showed when one incident boiled over. Ron Futchter was booked for a foul on Alan Waldron. After receiving attention Waldron was also cautioned for comments to the ref, and Blackpool skipper Peter Suddaby reacted by kicking the ball into the crowd so he too was given a look at the yellow card.

Billy Ronson, over-keen in his competitiveness, was booked later for a foul on Paul Futchter, and Mr Meadows amazed me by saying later that Blackpool would appeal against that one.

With their midfield forced to expand most of its energy on defensive duties, Blackpool had rarely threatened close range danger to the Town goal, although three times Milija Aleksic was in difficulty dealing with corners.

Blackpool felt that luck was on their side when they went in at half-time, and after a stern lecture

from manager Meadows they began to compete with the Town's midfield after the break.

But they were killed off when Paul Price took steps to expose full-back Larry Milligan to set up two goals in two minutes, aided each time by a telling pass from Stein.

The winger made two astute passes and each time Price took them in his stride, beat the full-back and crossed accurately.

The first, in the 77th minute, dropped nicely for Ron Futchter to catch the ball first-time to drive in a cracking drive from the edge of the box.

Mickey Walsh, ineffective in the absence of Bob Hutton, barely had time to be booked for protesting that the ball had gone out of play before Price crossed it, before the Stein and Price combination struck again.

This time Price's centre went to beyond the far post where Boersma took up perfect position to head in the Town's third goal.

That was the end for Blackpool, and their indignity was completed two minutes from time when Fuccillo raced through to smash in the fourth goal with a blistering low drive.

BLACKPOOL DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 4, BLACKPOOL 0

Half-time: 1-0

Brian Swain's verdict ★★★★★

TOWN: Aleksic; Price, Carr, Faulkner, Paul Futchter; Hill, West, Fuccillo; Stein, Ron Futchter, Boersma. Sub: Ingram, not needed.

BLACKPOOL: Ward; Gardner, Milligan, McEwan, Suddaby; Ronson, Tong (Wilson, 80 minutes), Chandler, Waldron; Walsh, Ainscow.

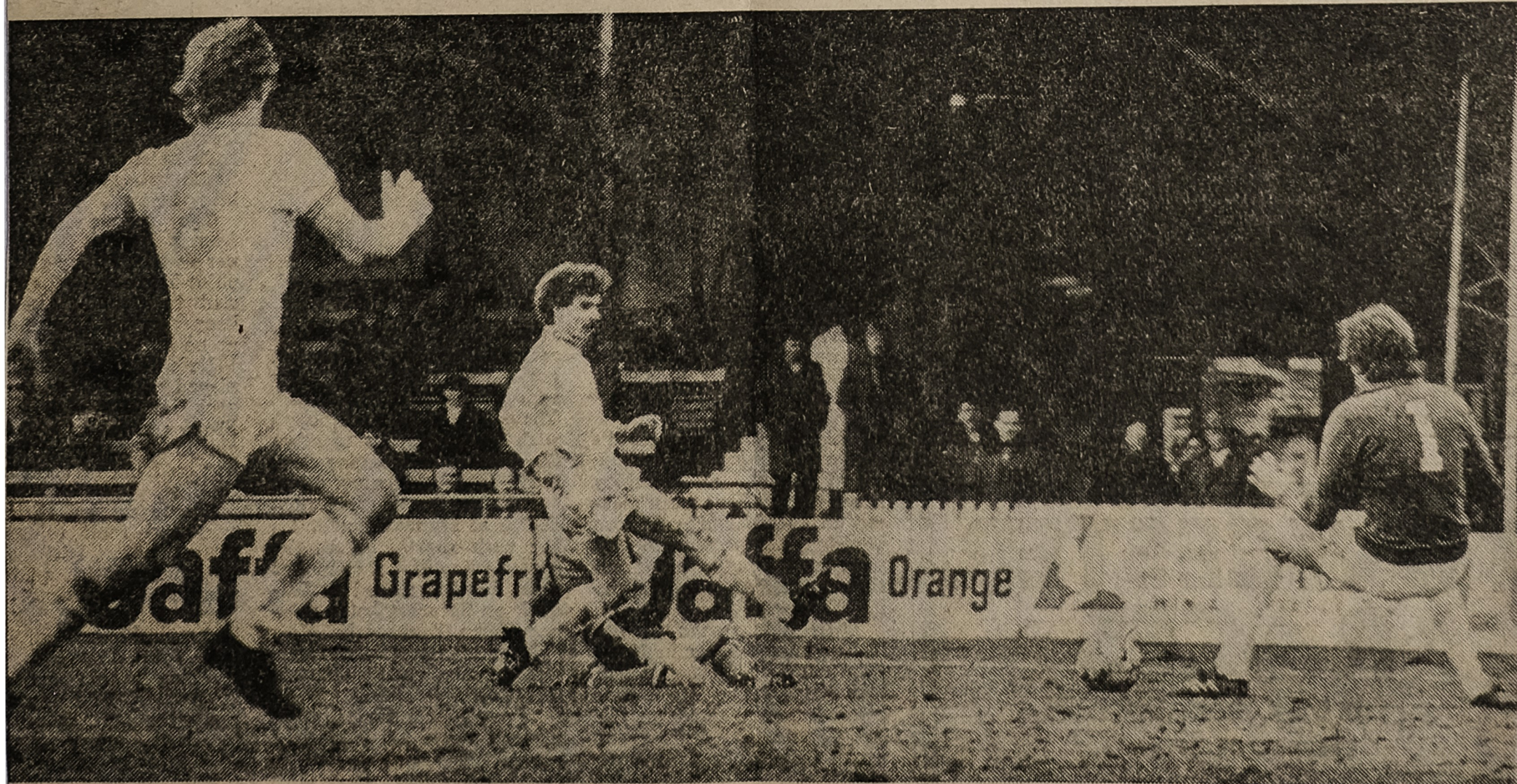
THE GOALS: Alan West header, 39 minutes, his second of the season; Ron Futchter drive, 77 minutes, his 12th; Phil Boersma, header, 79 minutes, his ninth; Lil Fuccillo drive, 88 minutes, his fifth.

REFEREE: Ron Challis, Tonbridge: Both managers were less than happy with his notebook performance.

ATTENDANCE: 6,041. The Town's performance deserved better even if their recent past results didn't.

BOOKINGS: Ron Futchter for a foul on Waldron — his second against Blackpool this season, and his sixth altogether. Waldron, Suddaby, Walsh and Ronson of Blackpool.

ENTERTAINMENT: The Town sparkled in everything but goals in the first half, then got the score-line they deserved in the second.



Lil Fuccillo, obscured by the defender trying to get in a tackle, knocks in the Town's fourth goal against Blackpool, two minutes from time. Picture: STEVE TEMPLEMAN.