

No hammering, but Geordies are second best

78/79

THE OUTSTANDING goal-scoring talents of previous home performances were replaced by professional grit and determination as the Town came out of their bad patch to beat Newcastle at Kenilworth Road.

Pre-match signs could hardly have been worse: the team had lost three league games on the trot, midfielder Ricky Hill had to drop out with a groin strain, and goalkeeper Milija Aleksic was dropped after a wages row with the manager.

But Newcastle, for all their proud traditions of being a major soccer power, were seen off and made to look very ordinary, unable to hold the Town in midfield and rarely a threat to a sound defence.

The Geordies looked capable of making a game of it only for the first 15 or 20 minutes, but gradually had to draw back and concentrate on defence, and finished the day second best in every department.

David Lawson was given a false impression for his first taste of Second Division football — the men in front of him effectively stopped the opposition reaching close quarters and he was able to get through the game with no hint of serious alarm.

He was under threat only twice in the 90 minutes: once when Alan West headed off the line to stop Mark McGee heading an equaliser, and once when a far post cross got through and McGee headed wide.

It was a bad mistake, but Newcastle never deserved equality. They were already struggling and trailing to a goal by Brian Stein in the 23rd minute when knee ligament injuries forced Peter Kelly to be carried off nine minutes before the interval.

Newcastle had to reshuffle their side but manager Bill McGarry accepted that Luton would have won

Newcastle Details

LUTON TOWN 2, NEWCASTLE 0

Half-time: 1-0

BRIAN SWAIN'S VERDICT: ★★★★★

TOWN: Lawson; Price, Aizlewood, Turner, Donaghy; Carr, Fuccillo, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Jones, not needed.

NEWCASTLE: Hardwick; Kelly (McGee, 36 minutes), Barton, Blackley, Brownlie; Walker, Mitchell, Hibbitt; Suggett, Withe, Connolly.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein, 23 minutes, from pass by Bob Hatton; Chris Turner, header, 84 minutes, from Lil Fuccillo's free kick.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town ten off target and six saved; Newcastle five off target and six saved.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not top quality, but the Town worked and battled to earn the points far better than Newcastle.

ATTENDANCE: 10,434. Only three gates were higher in the Second Division.

REFEREE: Malcolm Sinclair, Guildford: Kept good control throughout even if individual decisions were sometimes difficult to understand.

anyway. "We got what we deserved — sweet Fanny Adams," he said.

By contrast Town boss David Pleat was able to point out that his side had battled harder than usual, played much better than Newcastle, and had shown more aggression than in any previous game.

Lil Fuccillo and Alan West dominated proceedings, while Bob Hatton, Brian Stein and David Moss all posed huge problems compared with the puny attacking efforts of Newcastle.

Peter Withe, bought for

£200,000, was not given a single shot at goal by Chris Turner's sound marking, and with Mal Donaghy, Mark Aizlewood and Paul Price all tackling with power and good timing, the defence looked a league above Newcastle, and Turner was able to go upfield to head the second goal, his first for the Town, from Fuccillo's free kick six minutes from time.

It was a good job of work all round, and one man deserves special credit: David Carr, who was brought back to replace the injured Hill.

The jeers and catcalls that met him were not necessary. The lad knows he is not the best player in the Second Division. He knows he wasn't first choice on Saturday.

But he had the character to buckle down to the job in hand. He gave everything he had, and no supporter could ask for more than that.

Some voices were raised against him for the whole 90 minutes, including one very loud one from the Century Club seats, where the patrons reckon to be genuine football supporters.

It's one thing to believe the manager was wrong in his team selection. But the goading of one player was unnecessary, bad mannered and utterly pointless.

Even worse, on this occasion it was not even justified. McGarry would happily have welcomed a performance like Carr's in his midfield, and the fact that he didn't get it was the main reason his side lost.

I'm not president of the David Carr Fan Club, but at least I believe a little understanding and goodwill can be included in general appreciation of football.

And one last thought on the subject is worth consideration of the people who yelled for Carr to be substituted — Would you give in to those demands if you were the manager? It's the one sure way of making sure that the player does stay on the field.