

Super-goal by Hatton is the killer at The Valley

AFTER an amazing transformation at half-time, Town manager David Pleat's long wait to celebrate an away victory in the Second Division ended at The Valley on Tuesday night.

And fittingly, Bob Hatton, an inspired signing by the manager, was the man who made sure of it with a goal which must rank as one of the best even he has scored in his long career.

The 31-year-old legs pumped with the power of a young sprinter as he galloped 50 yards with the ball, outstripping defenders, before cracking a low drive into the far corner of the net.

It was a fitting climax to a strong all-round Town performance as the team picked itself up after a lack-lustre first half to crush Charlton Athletic in the second.

At the interval few Town supporters could have had much hope of success. At that stage Charlton had looked the better of two poor teams. They led 1-0 and had created half-a-dozen chances, one more than the Town.

A linesman who appeared to have difficulty seeing the complete width of the pitch gave them some help, and the Town defence occasionally looked too square.

But Chris Turner came out on top against Mike Flanagan, his old teammate with New England Tea Men in Boston, and it was hard to see where

Reports by Brian Swain Pictures: Steve Templeman

either side might find a goal until Martin Robinson popped up with a beauty in the 33rd minute.

Turner had already been booked after one offside move failed to impress the linesman, and it looked as though the flag should have gone up again as Brisley and Powell worked the ball down the Charlton right wing.

When the cross went over, Robinson twisted to score with a powerful near-post header, and the Town went off the boil for the rest of the half.

The half-time pep talk, however, must have been something special because, after it, Charlton were all but smothered as the Town took command.

The defence clamped down and became a cohesive unit, David Carr and Lil Fuccillo put the bite into the midfield tackling, and Alan West began to find gaps in the Charlton rearguard.

In the whole of the next 45 minutes Charlton had only two shots at goal, one cleared by Paul Price and

the other wasted when Powell shot over.

Jeff Wood, in the Charlton goal, sagged visibly as the Town turned on the pressure. Brian Stein might have grabbed a hat-trick, but his finishing on this occasion could not match the brilliance with which he got into dangerous positions.

David Moss started to play the way he does in home games, and by constantly taking his marker out to the flank helped to create space inside for Hatton and Stein.

The Town began to build sweeping attacking moves, but the goal that turned the match was almost too simple to be true. David Lawson made a save and punted the ball downfield.

Stein, midway in Charlton's half, outjumped Peter Shaw to knock the ball to Moss, and the winger beat Maddon for speed, took the ball into the penalty area and carefully shot across Wood's body into the far corner.

The Londoners never looked like recovering from

THIS week's two victories put the Town back on the fringe of the promotion race in the Second Division. They have 17 points and, although they are in ninth position, they are only two points short of third place.

Crystal Palace lead with 22 points, followed by Stoke with 20. West Ham, Fulham and Burnley all have 19.

The win at Charlton was the Town's first away league victory since December 10, last year, when a goal by Ron Futchter beat Southampton. They then had 18 away games in the league without a win.

It was David Pleat's first as a league manager, although the ice was well broken a fortnight ago with the League Cup success at Villa Park.

that shock, and even when they won a free-kick near the half-way line for a foul by West on Maddon, for which he was booked, the advantage turned dramatically against them.

The kick was knocked clear and the ball dropped to Hatton, ten yards inside the Town half. A check later showed that at that point he was precisely 67 yards from the Charlton goal.

There can't be many footballers cheeky enough to consider going for a goal from that range, but obviously Hatton is no ordinary player.

He set off on a speedy dribble with the lumbering figures of Shaw and Campbell chasing him, but always a yard short of tackling distance.

Hatton forged on, always in complete control of the ball, and reached the edge of the penalty area, in the inside-left position, before firing in the winning goal. Wood, who must have been wondering whether it was really happening, dived hopefully but too late.

That left Charlton with 20 minutes to save a point, but they were never given the slightest chance of regaining control, and long before the end their supporters were jeering in disgust.

CHARLTON DETAILS

CHARLTON ATH. 1, LUTON TOWN 2
Half-time: 1-0

BRIAN SWAIN'S VERDICT: ★★★★★

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

CHARLTON: Wood; Campbell, Maddon, Shaw, Berry; Gritt, Brisley, Peacock; Powell, Robinson, Flanagan. Sub: Penfold, not used.

THE GOALS: Martin Robinson, for Charlton, 33 minutes, near post header from right wing cross by Colin Powell; David Moss for the Town, 55 minutes, low drive from Brian Stein's headed pass; Bob Hatton, 70 minutes, solo effort, running from inside his own half with the ball and beating the goalkeeper from the edge of the penalty area.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and seven off target; Charlton four saved and three off target.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not brilliant, but the Town showed a huge improvement after half-time.

ATTENDANCE: 10,191, and only the faithful from Luton happy with what they saw.

REFEREE: Bill Bombroff, Bristol: Very sharp, but badly let down by one of his linesmen, who was very poor.

BOOKINGS: Chris Turner for dissent against the linesman; Alan West for a high tackle on Maddon; David Carr for persistent fouls.