

SUNDERLAND CASH IN ON TURNER'S ABSENCE

MANAGER DAVID PLEAT had two contrasting thoughts as he looked ahead to Saturday's task at Burnley after the wretched performance against Sunderland. "It's a new day, a new game and a new chance," he said. "We have to learn the lessons from this defeat, then forget the experience."

The lessons hurt the supporters as well as the players, with a feeling of bewilderment welling up as Sunderland took charge of the game and destroyed the Town.

Lesson One is that while we may be impatient for promotion there is a lot of work to be done yet, as much off the field as on it.

The game may well have been lost before it started when Chris Turner was ruled out with a thigh injury. For the first time this season the Town were without his height and power, and his absence was crucial as Sunderland scored all three goals with headers inside the penalty area.

Mal Donaghy wore the number 5 shirt, with Graham Jones brought in to play alongside him, but the Town defence rarely looked like an organised unit.

Sunderland used a flowing 4-4-2 formation, with men breaking from mid-field to support attacks, and they turned the Town's rearguard with considerable ease.

The first two goals were both defensive errors rather than brilliant attacking, with men unmarked in front of goal.

The second-half killer, a header at the far post, was a beauty, and in the end the Town were lucky to escape a worse hiding because in the last minute Gary Rowell hit the bar with another header.

Sunderland's leading scorer, he had a marvellous match, scoring twice and regularly finding space in the Town's penalty area to be available for strikes at goal.

Ricky Hill returned from injury after missing the victories against Newcastle and Charlton, but the Town's midfield was second best on the day, with Wilf Rostron and Mick Buckley

By **BRIAN SWAIN**

giving Sunderland control for nearly all the match.

They outshone Hill, Alan West and Lil Fuccillo, with the result that for long periods Sunderland looked like a home team, always tight at the back but adventurous in attack.

As manager Pleat said, Sunderland were by far the best visiting side we have seen at Luton this season, and there can be no complaints at the way they dished out the Town's heaviest home defeat since Spurs won 4-1 last February, on their way back to the First Division.

But at least both sides gave the crowd excitement in a cracking first half, with chances cropping up at both ends.

Bob Hatton's speed worried Clarke and Elliott, and for the first 20 minutes it was an even and entertaining clash. But Sunderland tipped the balance when Rowell had yards of space to head the first goal from Rostron's centre from the left wing.

There was little excuse

for the poor marking and lack of challenge, because the centre followed a set piece, with Sunderland building the goal from a short free kick.

David Moss twice went close to equalising, once with a low drive from a short free kick by West which beat Siddall but scorched into the side netting an inch or two the wrong side of the post, then with another shot narrowly wide from a chance created by Fuccillo and Hatton.

They turned out to be the best Town attempts of the game. Lawson had to make a good save from Lee, after the Sunderland

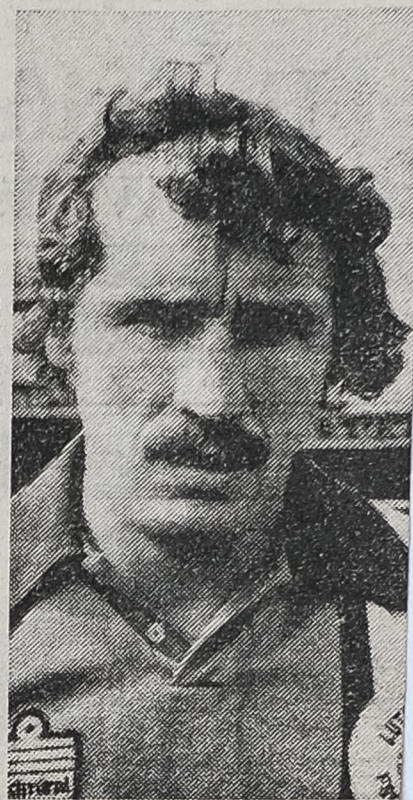
player had got past Aizlewood, and the visitors never looked like losing after Entwistle headed their second goal in the 38th minute. Again it was from a left-wing cross, this time by Buckley, and again there was no challenge to the Sunderland man as he scored.

The Town raised their game at the start of the second half, but rarely disturbed Sunderland's well-organised defence, and the fight was over when Rostron and Buckley worked the ball down the right wing and Rowell helped himself to his second goal with a far post header from Rostron's centre.

The only serious reply was a thundering drive from Hill which Siddall turned round a post, but even if that effort had brought a goal it is hard to believe that the Town could have saved a point.

Their only consolation is that after the game Sunderland players and officials were unanimous in saying that it was their best performance of the season.

It was a good all-round team effort which deserves success, and the Town boss accepted that. "We haven't disgraced ourselves," said Pleat. "Sunderland are a very good side, the best we have seen down here this season."



● CHRIS TURNER

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0, SUNDERLAND 3

Half-time: 0-2

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

SUNDERLAND: Siddall; Henderson, Bolton, Clarke, Elliott; Chisholm, Buckley, Rostron, Lee; Entwistle, Rowell. Sub: Brown, not used.

THE GOALS: Three headers on the end of crosses from the flanks: Gary Rowell scoring two, 20 and 65 minutes, and one by Wayne Entwistle, 38 minutes.

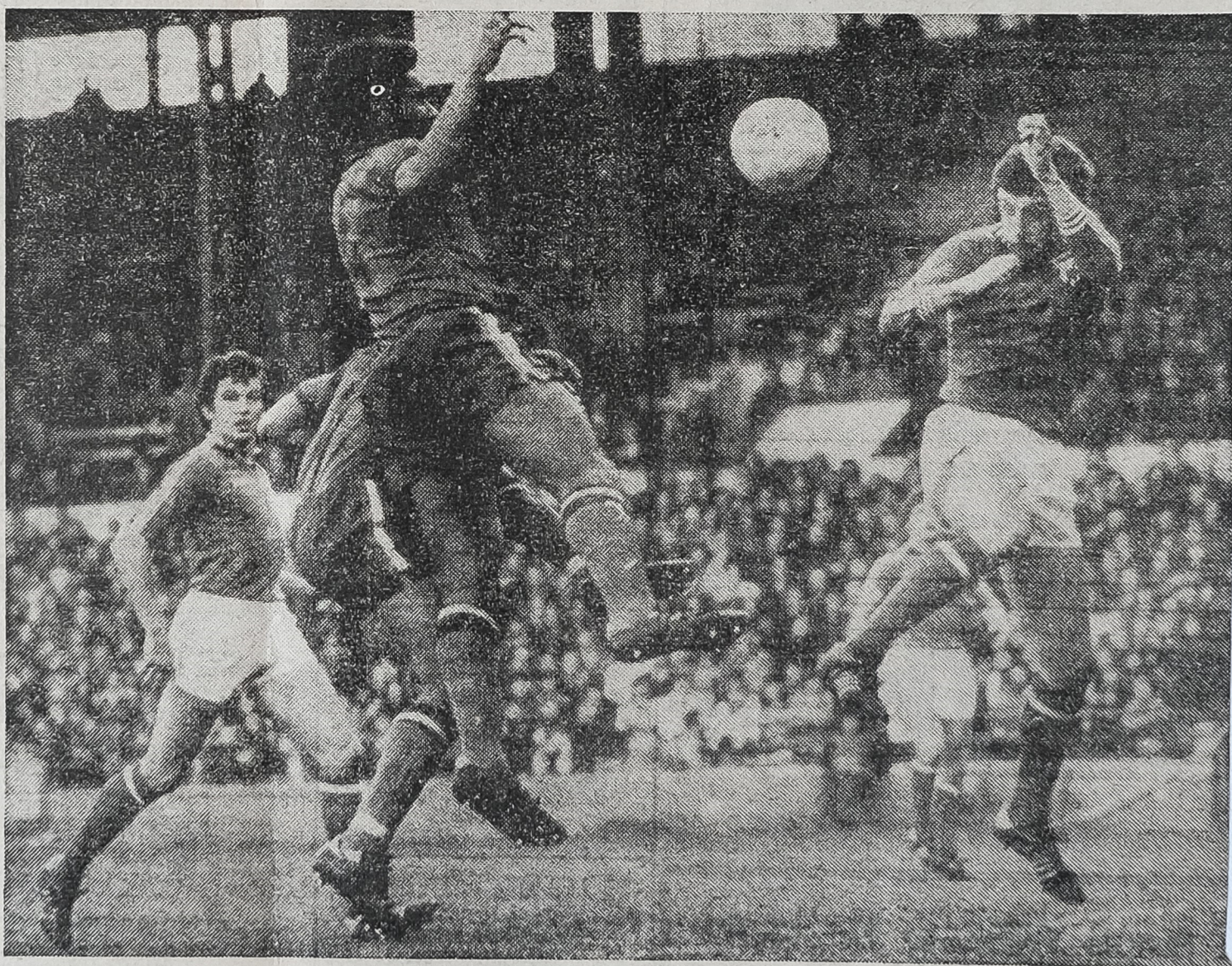
OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven off target and six saved; Sunderland four off target, four saved, one hit the bar.

ATTENDANCE: 10,249, third successive gate over the 10,000 mark.

REFEREE: Alan Seville, Birmingham: seemed very fussy, but he and his linesmen weren't the worst team on the field.

BOOKINGS: Jeff Clarke of Sunderland for a foul; Mal Donaghy for bringing down Entwistle.

ENTERTAINMENT: Probably a good game if you were neutral or a Sunderland supporter.



● ONE THAT GOT AWAY: Ricky Hill and Brian Stein go in to meet a far post cross by Bob Hatton in an early Town raid. The defender was beaten but goalkeeper Barry Siddall made the save look easy.