

Defender saves blushes of the strikers

78/79

BLACKBURN DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 2, BLACKBURN 1
Half-time: 0-1

DEFENDER Chris Turner stormed upfield to show his forwards the way to goal and grab a dramatic late winner against Blackburn Rovers on Saturday. It brought a touch of sanity and justice to the strange proceedings which had gone before.

Turner met a corner by Barry Silkman with a ferocious header to give the Town victory just three minutes from time, and hand out a defeat which dumped Blackburn at the bottom of the Second Division.

The result was justice, but for a long time it had looked as though struggling Blackburn were going to get away with a snatch-and-grab robbery, by courtesy of some very poor Town finishing.

Poor Bob Hatton, bought to score goals, was among the chief culprits. As early as the 12th minute Brian Stein fed him a perfect short pass in the box, but Hatton, trying to break a duck stretching back to last November, pulled his shot wide.

There seemed no danger of Blackburn doing much more than defend in depth, but in the 18th minute their two-man strikeforce was augmented by an overlapping run by left-back John Bailey.

He slanted an accurate centre into the goalmouth, and while the Town's marking may be open to criticism, Simon Garner deserves credit for a perfectly-executed diving header which put Blackburn ahead with their first strike at goal.

Luckily for the Town, Blackburn decided to try to hold on to their slender lead and hard and sometimes crude defence became the by-word.

The one man who looked like lifting the game was Barry Silkman, whose whole-hearted efforts and cheeky skills turned him into an instant hero at Kenilworth Road. He delivered full proof, if it were needed, that he is fit and healthy, and worth the £100,000 Manchester City nearly paid for him.

Alan West went close with a near post header from a Silkman cross and the game became a battle of two crowded midfields and a packed Blackburn penalty area.

The equaliser finally arrived in the 64th minute, and was a case of poetic justice in its conception as well as on the run of play.

Alan Birchenall upended Silkman with a crude tackle which should have brought a booking at least. Silkman reacted angrily and seemed to threaten to punch the offender, for which he might easily have been sent off.

Referee Naphine let both players off with a lecture, and from the free kick David Carr, deputising for the injured Mal Donaghy, made space down the right wing and from his centre West burst through from midfield to score his second goal of the season.

It was the end of the road for Blackburn, even though the winner was a long time coming. Turner had just brought Butcher to a thrilling save as the Town piled on the pressure, and the big man finally saved his forwards' blushes by heading the winner the Town deserved from a right-wing corner taken by man-of-the-match Silkman.

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Aizlewood, Turner, Price; West, Carr, Hill, Silkman; Stein (Taylor, 48 mins), Hatton.

BLACKBURN ROVERS: Butcher; Fowler, Bailey, Round, Fazackerley; Metcalfe, Hird, Birchenall, Parkes; Garner, Craig. Sub: Brotherston, not used.

THE GOALS: Garner for Blackburn, 18 minutes, diving header from centre by Bailey; Alan West for the Town, 64 minutes, from right-wing cross by David Carr; Chris Turner for the Town, 87 minutes, thumping header from corner by Barry Silkman.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and seven off target; Blackburn three off target and one saved.

ENTERTAINMENT: Another rousing finale, and a sparkling display by Barry Silkman on his debut compensated for a lot of frustration in the first hour or so.

REFEREE: G. J. Naphine, Loughborough: Finicky on small points and failed to crack down on more major incidents. Many refs would have sent off Birchenall and Silkman when they clashed just before the equaliser. They deserved a yellow card at least.

BOOKING: Derek Fazackerley for a foul on Steve Taylor.

ATTENDANCE: 6,247 — discerning fans were obviously waiting for West Ham's visit.