

PENALTY ROW HITS BATTLING HATTERS

ERIC HARRIS AT TURF MOOR

DEFEAT can often be a bitter pill to swallow. But there are occasional matches when managers and players feel a deep sense of satisfaction when they've lost.

Luton's 2-1 defeat at Burnley last night was a harsh result for the Town — but it may have provided a significant springboard for optimism as David Pleat's team prepare to play out the rest of the season.

Pleat saw his team play more football than their Lancashire opponents and, although Luton dropped two points on an icy cold night, he found consolation in defeat.

"I am disappointed with the result, but not with the way we played," he said after the game. "We have proved in some of our recent games that we have the ability to play well. But we are not taking the points."

Luton were livid with substitute Barnsley referee Trelford Mills, who awarded Burnley a controversial 42nd minute penalty — a decision which led to Mark Aizlewood being booked.

He is now over the 20 point disciplinary mark and faces an automatic suspension when Mr Mills' report reaches Kenilworth Road. The penalty decision was a comedy of errors and Aizlewood probably has every reason to feel aggrieved with his booking.

Booking

Goalkeeper Jake Findlay had been troubled only once early in the first half before Steve Kindon capitalised on a back-pass from Chris Turner.

Kindon raced through as Findlay came out to take the ball from his feet. It didn't look a penalty, but Mr Mills immediately pointed to the spot.

Peter Noble, who has never missed a penalty in his career with Burnley, pushed the ball tamely to Findlay's left and the 'keeper dived to push the ball away with his legs.

Beaten — but Luton turn on the skills

But Luton's joy immediately turned to anger and frustration when the referee indicated Findlay had moved before Noble struck the ball and ordered it to be retaken. Aizlewood's protests earned him a booking.

This time, Noble changed direction with his kick and beat Findlay's outstretched arms.

That goal was cruel justice for Luton, who had contributed much to the first half with well-worked and intricate approach play. They dominated the early stages and Findlay's only moment of anxiety was in the second minute when he dived on Peter Robinson's low shot.

The only flaw in Luton's approach work was their inability to turn it into goals, although they could have taken a deserved lead in the 15th minute when David Carr, under pressure, did well to flash a centre across the face of the goal with no one in the right position to take advantage of his industrious effort.

There were also chances for Steve Taylor, whose shot was blocked by Robinson, and Bob Hatton, who turned the ball just over the bar.

Luton's best move of the first half came after 30 minutes when Alan West, wide on the right, cleverly floated his centre across for Taylor to feed Brian Stein, who headed wide.

Burnley survived hectic pressure as Jim Thomson conceded a corner at the base



■ Jake Findlay correctly anticipates the direction of Noble's first penalty attempt



■ Kirk Stephens and Mark Aizlewood provide cover for Findlay as Burnley attack

of a post as Taylor was ready to stab the ball into the net. Then came that disputed penalty three minutes before the break.

At the start of the second half there were still distinct signs that Luton were capable of winning at least one point. Hatton pounced on to a bad back pass and squared the ball to West, who won only a fruitless corner.

Then after 53 minutes, Burnley broke to score their second — and the build-up fully warranted the goal. Kindon fed Leighton James, who split Luton's defence with a superb diagonal pass. Noble knocked the ball past Findlay, although it was helped into the net by Mal Donaghy's deflection.

The game now looked beyond Luton's reach but, six minutes later, they hit back with an equally brilliant goal.

It was engineered by David Carr — who enjoyed a fine game — when he pushed the ball into Hatton's path from the right. Hatton had his back to the goal but turned well and took the ball in his stride to push it out of Alan Stevenson's reach with his left foot.

So Luton returned home beaten but not disgraced after a 90-minute excursion where they could justifiably argue the referee contributed more to their downfall than Burnley.

MATCH DETAILS

BURNLEY: Stevenson; Scott, Brennan, Noble, Thomson, Rodaway, Jakub, Robinson (Hall), Fletcher, Kindon, James.

LUTON: Findlay; Stephens, Aizlewood, Donaghy, Turner, Hill, West, Carr, Taylor, Hatton, Stein. Sub: Price.

REFEREE: T. Mills (Barnsley).

ATTENDANCE: 7,540.

GOALS: Noble (42 pen, 53), Hatton (59).

BOOKINGS: Rodaway, Kindon, Aizlewood (dissent), Carr (foul on Kindon).



■ No joy for Noble this time as Findlay collects the ball