

West's gem of a goal dispels the relegation threat

78/79

ONE of the few good things to say about Saturday's final home match of the season was that at least the Town got the victory they needed to end the threat of relegation.

Fulham obliged by coming with little ambition and no great effort, having reached the stage where this season no longer mattered.

Their manager, Bobby Campbell, declined to attend the usual Press conference after the game. I don't blame him, because he would have struggled to find explanations for his side's failure to contribute much to a dull match.

David Pleat and his men at least had the satisfaction of the delight that followed the end of a long spell of tension and fear, even if it did show for much of the game.

Fulham's enterprise was so minute that only twice in the 90 minutes was Jake

Findlay's goal seriously threatened — once when Peter Kitchen was put through on his own, and Findlay made a crunching spreading save at his feet, and once when Gordon Davies tried late a pot-shot from 20 yards, which hit a post.

Effort and persistence gave the Town the edge, although Findlay's save from Kitchen was vital. It came in the 53rd minute and prevented an equaliser which would have put all the pressure back on the Town.

They had led from the 22nd minute when John Beck and Alan West competed to reach a low cross from Brian Stein, and the Fulham defender turned the ball into the net, the fourth own goal in four consecutive games for the Town.

Alan Birchenall's calmness and authority in mid-field was much missed—he was out through injury — although Mal Donaghy did at least bring more hardness into that department.

But Bob Hatton had another fruitless 90 minutes, while Brian Stein was left to carry too much weight in attack.

But two minutes after Findlay's save at Kitchen's feet, West, the man for all seasons, maintained his tradition of making his goals count for quality than than by quantity.

Lazy marking gave him a couple of yards in the box to collect an accurate long ball from Kirk Stephens, the Bobbers Club player of the year, and West celebrated by drilling his shot carefully between Digweed and the far post.

It was only his third goal of the season, but easily the most important. Harry Haslam's signings hadn't all become bad buys overnight after all.

SATURDAY'S DETAILS

LUTON TOWN 2, FULHAM 0

Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Aizlewood, Phillipson-Masters, Price; Donaghy, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Taylor, not used.

FULHAM: Digweed; Evans, Strong, Money, Hatter; Lock Gale, Beck; Davies, Guthrie, Kitchen. Sub: Lovell, not used.

THE GOALS: John Beck, own goal for the Town, 22 minutes, under pressure from Alan West to reach low, near-post cross by Brian Stein; West, 55 minutes, low drive beautifully taken from deep, long cross by Kirk Stephens.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six off target and four saved; Fulham five off target, one saved, one hit post.

ATTENDANCE: 9,122—boosted by allowing the ladies in for free. The paying customers will surely want a better run for their money next season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Fulham went through the motions like a team with nothing to play for; the Town's game suffered from too much tension and nerves.

REFEREE: Derek Richardson, Lincoln — made some odd decisions, and so did his linesmen.

BRIGHT SPOT: Victory ensured Second Division soccer at Kenilworth Road next season, and a chance for David Pleat to be third time lucky. With cruel irony, it also helped to put Sheffield United and Harry Haslam into the Third Division for the first time in their history.