

News 1 'GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE FIRST DIVISION'



ON TOP: Mike Saxby gets above Steve Wicks and goalkeeper Chris Woods to head the Town's goal from Paul Price's free kick.



SO NEAR: The moment the Rangers nearly gave away a killer goal, three minutes after the interval. Steve Wicks, in the dark shirt, raced back to clear after his back-pass had given David Moss a sight of goal. The goalkeeper is stranded in the background as Moss chases the ball across the goal-mouth and Wicks boots clear.

Luton can do it, says QPR boss Docherty

JUST HOW big is the gap between the top of the Second Division and the bottom of the First? That was one of the questions on Saturday after the Town's best crowd for three years had been given a soccer treat in everything but goals.

Town boss David Pleat won't even talk about promotion yet, but Tommy Docherty, beaming manager of Queens Park Rangers, was in no doubt.

I thought his side had stolen a point, but his views on how the Town and QPR might fare if they do win promotion were given honestly enough.

"Can these two teams survive in the First Division if they get there?" I asked. I fancy Docherty was thinking of teams like Brighton and Derby when he answered: "From some of the First Division sides I have seen this season, the answer is yes."

QUALITY

And while Docherty badly wants to get back into the big-time, he was honest again in his admission that Luton were the better of two teams who had provided a top quality advert for the Second Division.

"Luton are the best side we have played against this season," he said—the fourth manager to make that comment out of the 14 we have met so far. "They were the better side for long spells, and

did enough to win. But don't forget we could have won the game at the end." He was referring to a bad miss by Clive Allen, after Mike Saxby's only mistake of the match. The Second Division's leading scorer shot over the bar when well placed in the 89th minute.

A Rangers victory would have been a huge miscarriage of justice, because they never matched the Town's skills, and I was disappointed that the Londoners were allowed to snatch even one point.

LONELY

Jake Findlay was a cold lonely man for long periods—"We had to defrost him at half-time," was Eric Morecambe's crack.

Chris Woods in the other goal was constantly in action, particularly when the Town slipped into top gear for the final five minutes of the first half.

Kirk Stephens was outstanding in defence and attack, and joined up with Alan West, Tony Grealish and Bob Hatton in a breathtaking move which ended with David Moss shooting a few inches over the bar.

The Town's football, with short quick passing and clever running off the ball to give the man in possession two or three alternatives each time, was lovely to watch and the Rangers' defence took a hammering.

SAVED

Stephens lashed a shot against the post with Woods beaten, Moss had a shot saved, and Woods excelled with a tremendous dive to keep out a header by Brian Stein.

The inevitable goal finally arrived in the 44th minute of a first half which ran for 51 minutes.

THE TOP TEAMS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Luton Town	15	8	5	2	28	14	21
Newcastle	15	8	4	3	19	12	26
Birmingham	15	8	4	3	20	14	26
QPR	15	8	3	4	28	14	19
Leicester	15	7	5	3	28	20	19
Notts Co	15	7	4	4	23	15	18
Swansea	15	7	4	4	19	17	18

Report by Brian Swain
Pictures: Mark Richards

Glen Roeder was penalised for a push on West, and Paul Price's free kick was met with a thumping header by Mike Saxby for his second goal of the season.

Rangers were down but not quite out as the Town kept in control at the start of the second half. A poor back-pass by Steve Wicks let in Moss, but the defender got back to repair the damage with a goal-line clearance and shortly afterwards Woods caught a header from Hatton and sparked claims for a goal.

REJECTED

The striker was certain the ball had crossed the line, but the claims were rejected, and later Hatton foolishly collected a booking for dissent when he asked the ref to take action over a clash between Moss and Don Shanks. Wicks and Hazell had been booked earlier, and Shanks later got his yellow card for a foul on Moss.

Rangers equalised when Saxby charged down a shot by Roeder on the edge of the box and quicksilver Allen evaded Price's tackle and scored with great composure and expertise.

BETTER

Without maintaining their purple patch to the end, the Town always looked the better side to me, and I couldn't share Mr Docherty's conclusion that a draw was the right result.

But Mr Pleat was happy enough and refused to have it said that this was a case of a point lost. "It is important at this stage not to lose," he said.

He was "not too pleased" with the way the Town missed chances, but was delighted by the general standard set by his team—"If we can keep that sort of football going we have no problems."

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 1, QPR 1

Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Hill, West, Grealish, Stein, Hatton, Moss. Sub: Aizlewood, not used.

RANGERS: Woods; Shanks, Gillard, Hazell, Wicks; McCreery, Roeder, Currie (Burke, 70 mins); Bowles, Allen, Goddard.

THE GOALS: Mike Saxby for the Town, 44 minutes, header from free kick by Paul Price; Clive Allen for Rangers, 64 minutes, after Saxby blocked a shot by Glen Roeder.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town ten saved, nine off target and one hit the woodwork; Rangers three saved and six off target.

ENTERTAINMENT: A superb advertisement for the Second Division, with the Town the better side except in the art of taking chances.

ATTENDANCE: 19,619, highest since the visit of Fulham (with Rodney Marsh and George Best) in September 1976.

REFEREE: Brian Martin, Keyworth, Notts — handled a difficult, hard game reasonably well.

BOOKINGS: Steve Wicks for a foul on Stein, Bob Hazell and Bob Hatton for dissent; Don Shanks for a foul on Moss.

Lead is cut to a single point

ONE POINT was enough to keep the Town on top of the Second Division, but Newcastle and Birmingham narrowed the gap, and the promotion fight could well go on until next May—the Town's last two away games are against Birmingham and Newcastle.

Queens Park Rangers dropped from second place to fourth in a league table still heavily congested. Half the division are still within four points of a place in the top three.

Newcastle regained second place, a point behind the Town and ahead of Birmingham on goal difference, when a goal by Alan Shoulder was too much for Cardiff before the day's biggest Second Division attendance, 22,880 at St James's Park.

Birmingham also got through by

the only goal, by substitute Steve Lynex, against struggling Cambridge, who have now gone eight games without a victory.

Leicester dropped from third place to fifth when they were held at home by bottom club Burnley, who entertain the Town on Saturday. Leicester had a nasty shock because Burnley, who have not won since last April, grabbed the lead in the 67th minute through Leighton James. Alan Young saved a point by scoring 12 minutes later.

Burnley's chilling record is now 28 matches without a win—enough to send a shiver or two down Town supporters' spines as well, over the

realisation that such a run has to end sometime.

Notts County, 2-1 home winners over Preston, and Swansea, who beat Sunderland 3-1 at Vetch Field, stayed in the chase, but Chelsea produced the day's best result.

They bounced back from two defeats with their 1000th league victory, and their best-ever away from home. They won 7-3 against Orient, who had taken nine points out of the previous ten. Lee Frost scored a hat-trick and Clive Walker got two.

Down at the bottom Burnley are beginning to lose touch, with six points from 15 matches. Four teams are in danger with ten points—Fulham, beaten 2-1 at Craven Cottage by West Ham, Cambridge, and Watford, who lost a vital game against fellow-strugglers when they went down by one goal at Shrewsbury.