

NO EXCUSES AS CUP HOPES GO CRASHING

THE MANAGER'S FA Cup jinx returned with a vengeance to Kenilworth Road as Third Division Swindon gave David Pleat his third defeat in three cup attempts.

The Town didn't deserve to win against a team which worked hard for each other for 90 minutes with a brand of simple but direct soccer which had already accounted for Arsenal in the League Cup.

The biggest puzzle was how the Town could be so brilliant against Chelsea on New Year's Day, and then so poor four days later.

In theory they should have been better equipped for the cup-tie because Tony Grealish was back after injury. But for too long he was fighting a lone battle in midfield as a rash of misplaced passes spread through his team-mates.

Mal Donaghy returned to left back, and was my man of the match, despite facing one of Swindon's best players, Ian Miller.

The Town boss didn't look for excuses for the poor showing, giving Swindon due praise for the way they buckled down to their task.

Two first-half incidents summed up the Town's misery. In the very first minute Bob Hatton took his marker wide on the right flank, and as the goalkeeper went out to cover pulled the ball back to the edge of the penalty area.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 0, SWINDON TOWN 2

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Hill, Grealish, West; Stein (White, 45 mins), Hatton, Moss.

SWINDON: Allan; Lewis, Stroud, Tucker, Carter; McHale, Kamara, Miller, Williams; Rowland, Mayes. Sub: Ab-bely, not needed.

THE GOALS: Andy Rowland, 28th minute, after ball went loose following a long free-kick; Brian Williams, 82nd minute, long forward ball intended as a pass deflected in off a post.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town eight off target and nine saved; Swindon six off target and eight saved.

REFEREE: Colin Downey, Hounslow. Town were convinced he missed a foul on Jake Findlay which led to him dropping the ball to give Swindon their first goal.

ENTERTAINMENT: Nothing like the recent high standard set by the Town, and Swindon deserved to win.

ATTENDANCE: 12,458 — and some of them will need a lot of persuading to pay more for future matches in the Second Division.

Report by
BRIAN SWAIN
Sports Editor

79/80 (FAC)

Brian Stein snatched at the chance, and shot wide of the empty net. Swindon took full advantage of the let-off, and from then on Roy Carter and Billy Tucker closed up the middle.

Stein was injured in that first attack, and brought off at half-time to give home fans their first look at new recruit Steve White.

He fared no better than Stein as Swindon worked hard to get behind the ball when danger threatened.

The second crucial incident came when Swindon took the lead, in the 28th minute. Jake Findlay is positive he was fouled as he went up to try to catch a long free kick from Ken Stroud.

Referee Colin Downey, who missed a penalty incident when he was in charge of the Gillingham League Cup shambles at the start of the season, saw nothing wrong and the ball ran loose for Andy Rowland to smash in his 19th goal of the season.

Earlier he had put a free header over the bar, and hooked a fair chance wide, so the Town had had plenty of warning of Rowland's danger.

Findlay had to go full length to keep out another effort by Rowland, and 40 minutes had ticked by before the Town started to get back into the game.

Alan West cracked a drive which Jimmy Allan was glad to punch out, and Grealish hit a screaming shot narrowly past the post.

David Moss, who ought to have been well motivated against the side he served for nine years, put a cross-shot the wrong side of the far post, and for a time the Town seemed capable of forcing an equaliser.

Their assault gathered pace early in the second half, with Mike Saxby joining attacks, but Allan made two important saves, one with a rush at Ricky Hill's feet and the other from a header by Donaghy.

The full-back got through twice more, put-



● **FOILED AGAIN:** Swindon goalkeeper hero Jimmy Allan clasps the ball to his chest as another second-half attack by the Town grinds to a halt. Steve White, making his first home appearance for his new club, as substitute for Brian Stein, is the attacker.

PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

ting one low drive wide and having another saved, and Allan's efforts saw his side through.

Swindon used Miller and Brian Williams as auxiliary forwards behind Rowland and Alan Mayes, and those two got through a tremendous amount of work to hold things together in midfield and then back up attacks.

As the Town's recovery efforts wilted, full-back Russell Lewis forced Findlay to make the best save of the match, but in the 82nd minute the Town's resistance crumbled. Williams tried a hopeful 30-yard forward ball, and a wicked deflection took it past Findlay and into the net off a post.

Paul Price forced Allan to another dramatic save five minutes later, after a corner had brought a scramble in the goal-mouth, but by that time dispirited home supporters were already leaving the ground.

Some of them will surely wonder whether Saturday's league game with Leicester is the right time to be asked to pay an extra 50p to watch the Town.

The Town manager made no excuses: "We didn't play well," he said. "And the first vital break went to Swindon. We lost our style a little, and were forced to play long balls, which is not our game."

Swindon boss Bob Smith, once a colleague of David Pleat in an England youth team, suggested that perhaps his lads had something to do with Luton's absence of style.

"They're a good side," he said, "and we like playing good teams—it gives us a chance to show how good we are."

"I'm not at all surprised that we won. We came believing that a draw was the least we could get. We knew what we had to do, and it went according to plan."

"We shut out the danger-men in midfield and attack. Tucker had his best game of the season against Hatton and Lewis kept David Moss quiet."

"Once we had done that, it was just a matter of working at it and I don't think anyone can say we haven't earned the result."

A tradition of failure

DEFEAT by Swindon completed an unhappy FA Cup treble for David Pleat. His first game in charge of the Town, after Harry Haslam's departure, was at Millwall, where the Town chashed to a 4-0 defeat in the fourth round, in January 1978.

Last year they were bundled out at York, with the Fourth Division side winning the third-round tie 2-0.

It is now six years since the Town have got past the Fourth Round in the Cup. In 1974 they beat Port Vale in a replay in the third round, disposed of Bradford in the fourth at Kenilworth Road, and then lost 0-4 in the fifth round at home to Leicester.

In 1975 Birmingham won 1-0 in the third round at Kenilworth Road, but the following year the Town overcame the hurdle by beating Blackburn 2-0 at home, only to lose 0-2 at Norwich in the fourth round.

In 1977 a goal by John Aston gave the Town a third round victory at Halifax, but the traditional flop against lower division sides arrived when they lost 0-1 at Chester in the next round.

The 1978 cup campaign saw a third round replay win at Oldham before the arrival of the new manager for the debacle at Millwall.