

Cup-tie decided by late goals

UNABLE to produce the class soccer they had shown in earlier rounds, the Town went out of the FA Youth Cup at West Brom in a Fourth Round tie which was evenly balanced until the last 15 minutes.

Two late goals gave West Brom a 3-1 win, but it was a result which flattered them.

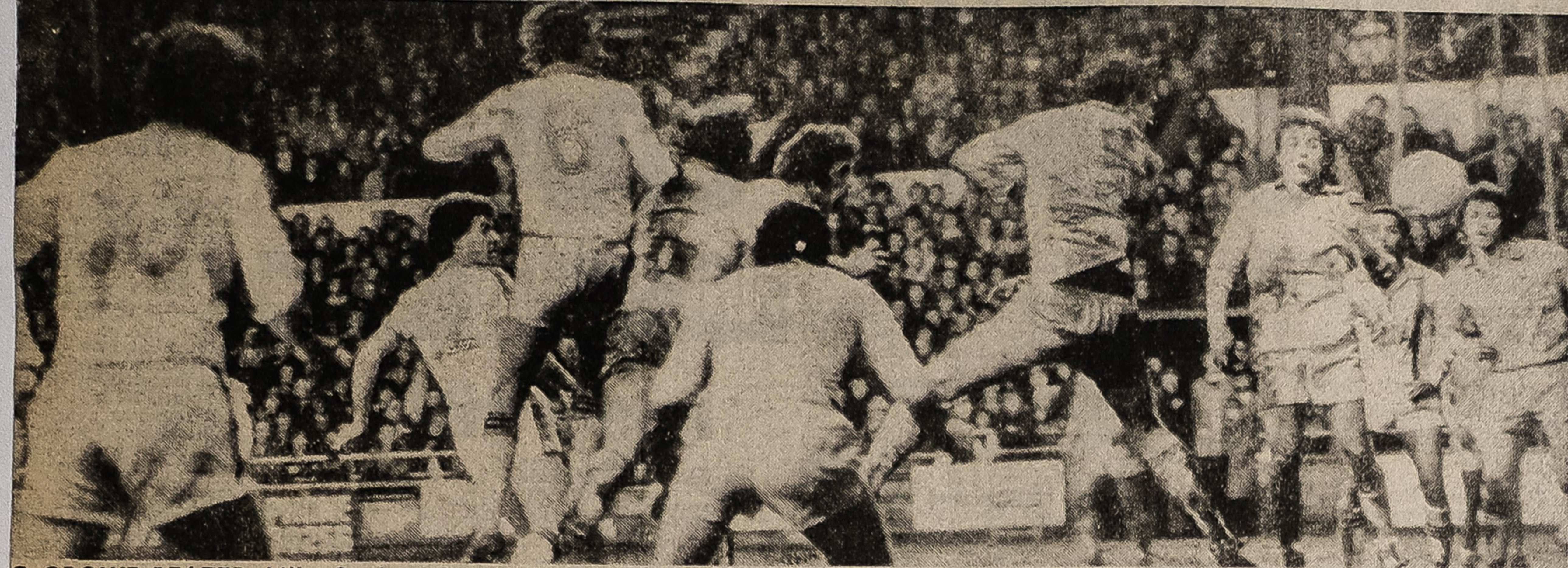
The crucial difference was that West Brom carried more front-line threat. Neil Madden had a sparkling game in midfield for the Town, but the front three of Mick Small, Frank Bunn and Seamus Heath could make little headway through a well-drilled defence.

West Brom's side included Ian Benjamin, a teenager they bought for £125,000 from Sheffield United, and his acceleration and quick thinking enabled him to put the home side ahead in the 13th minute with a clever lob over Rob Walker.

A through ball had done the damage, but Rob Johnson came up with one equally effective eight minutes later, and Small showed exceptional coolness in taking the full width of his marker, before drawing the goalkeeper and scoring a clever equaliser.

But 12 minutes from time a colleague's dummy let in Bowen to make it 2-1 and in the 83rd minute Benjamin snapped his second goal after a free kick had been headed down to him in the penalty area.

TOWN: Walker; Woodward, Murphy, Piotrowski, Foote; Johnsen, Cosby, Madden; Bunn, Small, Heath (Brammer, 82 mins).



● CROWD-BEATER: Mike Saxby, almost hidden from view in the centre of the picture, gets among the massed defenders to head the Town level from David Moss's free kick. PICTURES: JOHN SHORTHOUSE

SAFETY-FIRST NOTTS LOSE AT LAST

FACED BY a bunch of hard-working but unambitious mid-table rivals, the Town gave their supporters a lot of worry and a little encouragement before disposing of Notts County.

Two late goals rubbed out an early gift to the opposition, and the Town deserved to win. But they never looked First Division class, and struggled for a long time to break opponents who put their priority on defence.

Notts County very nearly killed the game by their tactics. In a 0-0 draw at Meadow Lane in September they played as though they were the away team, so their lack of ambition at Kenilworth Road was hardly surprising.

An early disaster piled up problems for the Town. In the third minute Ricky Hill was penalised for a foul on Gordon Mair down County's left flank.

STRANDED

Don Masson lofted the free kick on to the six-yard line, and Mal Donaghy's attempt to push the ball back to his goalkeeper left Jake Findlay stranded as the ball rolled into the net.

From then on County left only one man forward, and crowded out the Town by filling their penalty area with bodies.

The Town's nerves began to show, passing movements made little progress, and County survived with the aid of a mistake by referee Michael Taylor.

Brian Stein took on Ray O'Brien in the box and beat him before being tripped by the full-back's leg. It looked highly suspicious, to say the least, and the TV replay showed that the Town were justifi-

Report by
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Sports Editor

fied in their unsuccessful appeals for a penalty.

Donaghy put a fierce 20-yard drive over the bar, and the Town's only other decent first-half chance came and went when Stein was unable to control the ball from a pot at goal by Tony Grealish.

Alan West and Masson had a fascinating duel in midfield and in the County penalty area, but Grealish was well below his best.

PRESSURE

County invited the Town to move forward, but then left few holes for the final pass, and it had to be a case of incessant pressure as the visitors retired into their shell even more after the break.

They deserved what they got, because the Town's play improved considerably after the interval. West and Ricky Hill got well upfield, and West in particular deserved to be on the winning side.

One pass brought a neat flick by Stein to give Bob Hatton a shooting chance, but it was cancelled out when Yugoslav goalkeeper Raddy Avramovic sprang off his line to smother the shot.

The goalkeeper was the only Notts County man to actually contribute to the entertainment. He made another smothering save to stop David Moss scoring, then pulled off the save of

the day from the same player.

West had sent the winger clear down the left, and Moss cut inside and chipped the ball brilliantly towards the top far corner of the net. The keeper was off his line, but matched Moss's brilliance by soaring upwards to flick the ball over the bar.

Substitutions played a crucial role in the outcome. In the 70th minute Steve White replaced Grealish, and the Town opted for a 4-2-4 formation.

Jimmy Sirrel's answer was to pull off Iain McCulloch and send on Jim Doherty. "I thought we could hold on to win 1-0," said Sirrel later.

EQUALISER

His defenders were all in danger of going home punch-drunk, and it was ironic that Doherty's entrance was made just in time to see the Town get the equaliser.

It came from a free kick, almost from the spot where Masson's third-minute effort had been so damaging. Moss floated the ball into the area, and Saxby rose above friends and foes to head into the net.

It had to be the turning point, and two minutes later Hatton struck a superb winner. Again the instigator was West, with a short ball into the

penalty area. White knocked it back and Hatton rammed a first-time shot past Avramovic's right hand.

It was an instinctive effort, said Hatton, and you had to feel a little sympathy for the goalkeeper—with so many defenders in front of him, he had no chance of seeing the ball early enough to make the save.

Incredibly, Mr Sirrel denied suggestions that he had used defensive tactics to try to sneak a point or two.

I thought he had done a disservice to football with the sort of negative thinking liable to wreck the game as entertainment.

Mr Sirrel claimed: "You are defensive-minded when the other side attacks you. We pay people to keep the ball out of the net, so you might say it is a credit to the defence when they do that."

Luckily for the customers some teams also pay players to create things in midfield, and score goals at the other end.

BATTLED

County's players must have gone home well sick at losing to two goals in the last 12 minutes. I had a grudging admiration for the way they battled.

Visiting teams are never likely to risk everything on attack. But at least the Town's away style is to defend well, and look for the chance to counter-attack at speed and give the other defence something to think about.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2, NOTTS COUNTY 1

Half-time: 0-1

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish (White 70 mins), Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss.

NOTTS COUNTY: Avramovic; Benjamin, O'Brien, Stubbs, Blockley; Hunt, McCulloch (Doherty, 78mins), Masson, Mair; Christie, Hooks.

THE GOALS: Mal Donaghy, own goal, three minutes, back pass from free kick by Don Masson; Mike Saxby, 78 minutes, header from David Moss free kick; Bob Hatton, 80 minutes, expertly-taken low shot from half-chance made by Alan West and Steve White.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town 12 saved and seven off target; County five saved and four off target.

ATTENDANCE: 9,007—only three in the Second Division were higher.

REFEREE: Michael Taylor, Deal—TV proved he was wrong when he turned down appeals for a penalty after O'Brien brought down Brian Stein in the first half, but otherwise he had a good game.

ENTERTAINMENT: Too little for too long, with County's negative tactics showing why they don't have many supporters at away games.

THE TOP TEAMS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	P
Leicester	27	13	9	5	42	27	35
Newcastle	27	14	7	6	41	29	35
Luton	26	12	10	4	45	28	34
Chelsea	26	15	3	8	46	33	33
Birmingham	25	13	5	7	32	24	31
Sunderland	26	12	6	8	41	34	30

Shock of the day topples Chelsea

ONE OF the biggest shocks of the season helped the Town to go back into the top three in the Second Division promotion race. Shrewsbury, fighting to stave off relegation, went to Stamford Bridge, and beat second-placed Chelsea 4-2.

Shrewsbury had lost 12 of their 13 away games, and Chelsea hadn't lost at home for more than three months, but an 18,000 crowd was silenced as the underdogs kept control throughout. Chelsea dropped two places, to fourth.

In the crunch match of the day Leicester City reclaimed top place for the first time since late August, beating previous leaders Newcastle at Filbert Street. The day's biggest Second Division gate, 22,549, saw the game decided by an early penalty.

Leicester now lead Newcastle on goal difference only, with the Town one point below them, a point ahead of Chelsea.

The Town have the best goal-difference in the division, and also have a game in hand on the top two—the away fixture at Swansea.

Birmingham City kept their promotion hopes alive when a goal by Archie Gemmill gave them victory at Charlton. The Londoners are looking ripe for the drop to the Third Division.

Birmingham's first away win for two months — their last was at

Kenilworth Road — was achieved despite having Colin Todd sent off for swearing at the referee ten minutes into the second half.

Sunderland are still on the promotion fringe — their home game with West Ham was postponed because of snow.

At the bottom Fulham are in deep trouble, six points adrift of the nearest survival spot after losing a vital game at Turf Moor to Burnley.

Fulham have 15 points and Charlton 17. Five teams are on 21 points: Burnley, Watford, Bristol Rovers, Shrewsbury and Oldham, who entertain the Town on Saturday.

Oldham chalked up their first away win of the season at Preston, with the only goal of the game coming from Simon Stainrod, formerly of Sheffield United.



● SAVED: Yugoslav goalkeeper Raddy Avramovic beats Brian Stein to first-half cross.