

ROKER ROAR PLEADS FOR A MERCIFUL END

SUNDERLAND

Late saves hold on to points for Sunderland

A LITTLE touch of luck and a big helping of class goalkeeping rescued Sunderland at Roker Park on Saturday, and denied the Town at least one point which their battling performance deserved.

The luck came at half-time, when an injury forced Sunderland to pull out midfielder Shaun Elliott, and replace him with substitute Barry Dunn, a left winger.

The enforced re-shuffle of the side produced the combination which managed for just 15 minutes to put Sunderland on top, and grab the only goal to maintain their unbeaten home record.

By BRIAN SWAIN

FRIGHTENED

And when the Town did adjust their own pattern to snuff out the threat, goalkeeper Chris Turner saved the day for Sunderland with a succession of fine saves.

Two of them, against David Moss and Brian Stein, were outstanding, and the upshot was that although the Town had more shots at goal, home team Sunderland's frightened supporters had a happy ending after pleading for the final whistle from the 85th minute onwards.

The game took a long time to open up, with nerves and tension apparent in the Sunderland ranks.

ON THE RACK

Their home record is the best in the Second Division, but poor results on their travels mean that every home match for them is a cup-tie. The fear of defeat pervaded almost everything Sunderland did.

The Town brought back Kirk Stephens, relegated Mark Aizlewood to the sub's bench, and left Steve White out. As things turned out, perhaps White should have been sub to increase the Town's forward power in the last 15 or 20 minutes when Sunderland's fear of defeat put them on the rack again.

The value of Aizlewood, however, would enable David Pleat to answer that his inclusion meant that the Town had cover for any one of seven positions in defence or midfield if injury problems had arisen.

I got the impression that Sunderland were well prepared for the Town tactics. Stephens, Paul Price, Mal Donaghy and Mike Saxby showed every sign of being able to soak up any amount of pressure, and

with Alan West linking well in the middle of the park the quick counter-attack was always a threat.

Sunderland responded by slowing down their own attacks, with the result that there was not a lot of exciting goalmouth action.

GLANCED

Sunderland's only real chance in the first half went astray when Pop Robson, going through a lean spell, glanced a header wide of the post after Stan Cummins had got past Stephens on the left wing.

Against that a break led by West saw Brian Stein stopped at the expense of a corner, from which Turner did well to block Stein's shot after a head-down by Saxby.

Elliott limped out of the game with a twisted knee, and for the second half Cummins dropped back into midfield, and Dunn's work on the left wing speeded up the action and gave Sunderland more width.

Ricky Hill had to drop back more often to keep the defence up to strength, and the famous Roker Roar at last made itself heard.

PROBLEM

But if Sunderland looked to be getting on top in terms of possession, they were never allowed to relax because Stein's quickness and ball control was always a problem for Jeff Clarke and Rob Hindmarch.

He looked more lively than Bob Hatton and David Moss, but all three combined well, and it was

TRUE TO TRADITION

IT IS now nearly seven years since the Town won at Roker Park—a goal by Barry Butlin in September 1973 gave them their most recent victory there. Of the five visits since then The town have lost four, with Ron Fletcher scoring in a 1-1 draw in the 1977/78 season.

tough luck on Stein that he could not produce the finish that would have been the icing on the cake.

Hatton intercepted a midfield pass and sent Stein scampering through the middle. His acceleration was superb, leaving two men floundering, but the shot flashed wide of the far post.

Back came Sunderland, and three minutes later the Town's defence suffered for its only real mistake of the game.

UNMARKED

Mal Donaghy, the best man on the pitch for my money, headed a corner clear. As the danger seemed to be over, Town defenders and midfield men broke out, the traditional tactic after a corner has been cleared.

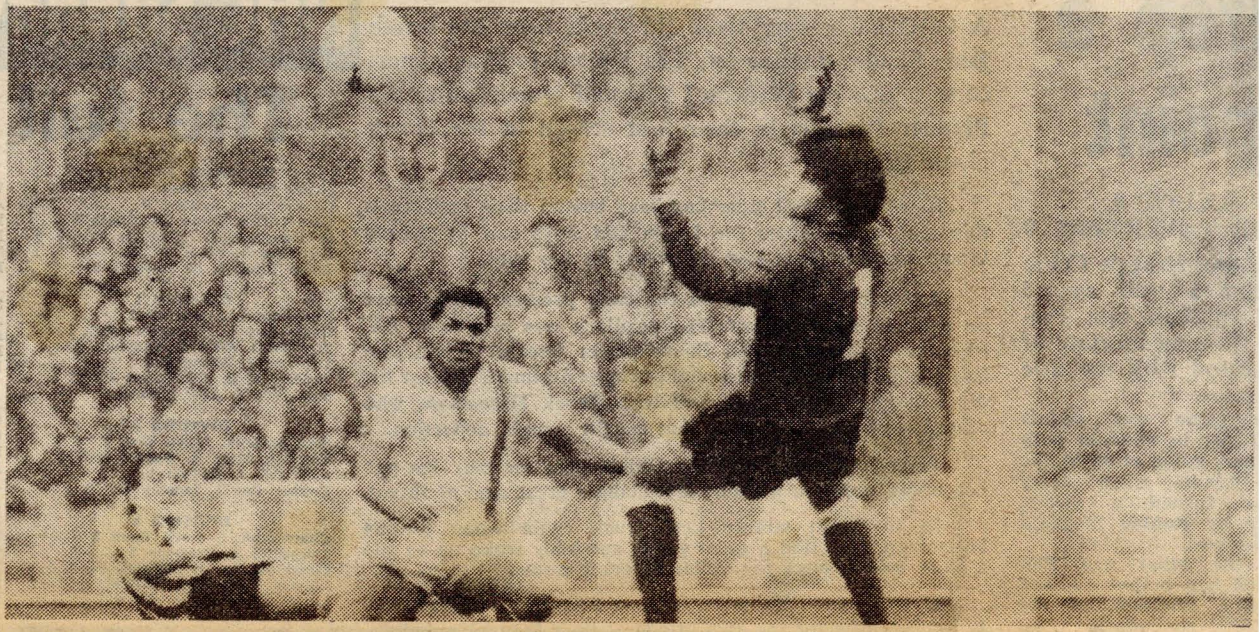
But they went a second or two early, and John Cooke, a 17-year-old playing his second league game because of injuries to other attackers, was left unmarked on the far post.

Cummins intercepted Donaghy's clearance, swung the ball to the left wing and Kevin Arnott hit a long centre goalwards. Robson's attempt to make contact failed, but threw the cover off guard, and Cooke had time and space to score with a simple shot from six or seven yards.

RETREATED

The goal had come at the climax of a sustained roar of support from the terraces, but Sunderland were still unable to take command.

They showed a lot of



● NEARLY: Brian Stein watches a second-half shot fly wide of the target.

respect for the Town's ability, and retreated at the first sign of danger. Hill and Tony Grealish again started pushing further forward, and Grealish played the best pass of the game to set up a possible equaliser.

In the 72nd minute, 11 minutes after Sunderland had scored, he threaded a lovely pass inside the full-back to set Moss racing through in the inside-right position. The winger's shot was hit with tremendous power, and looked a certain 22nd goal of the season until Turner took off to tip the ball round the post.

VERY CLOSE

And the goalkeeper saved his side once more a few minutes later when Stein again wriggled through the middle, aided by a neat quick pass from Hill. Stein was clear, but Turner timed his advance perfectly, and smothered the ball as Stein shot.

A draw would have been no more than the Town deserved and Sunderland boss Ken Knighton admitted: "It was a very close game—a bit like a cup semi-final with so much at stake for both teams."

Churlishly, he refused to pay any sort of tribute to the way the Town fought back in the closing stages, but David Pleat had no doubts: "We competed very well. We were worth a draw at least, and would have won if we had taken our chances."

"If we keep playing like that we won't be far off when the promotion places are decided."

Chasing group narrows the gap

WITH the top four teams in the Second Division all losing, the Town are still very much in the promotion battle, with their recent inconsistencies being cancelled out by faltering performances from rivals.

Saturday's results enabled the chasing bunch to draw nearer to the leaders, and the top eight teams are now covered by just eight points.

DOUBTS

Len Shackleton and Jackie Milburn were in the Press box at Roker Park, and both have doubts about the ability of any of the contenders to make a real impact after the promotion places are finally decided.

They believe that all three promoted teams could

THE TOP TEAMS										
	P	W	D	L	F	A	P			
Leicester	30	13	11	6	44	31	37			
Luton Town	29	13	10	6	50	31	36			
Chelsea	29	16	4	9	50	38	36			
Birmingham	28	15	6	7	37	25	36			
Newcastle	30	14	8	8	42	33	36			
West Ham	27	16	3	8	38	25	35			
QPR	30	14	6	10	56	39	34			
Sunderland	29	14	6	9	48	36	34			

discover that being good enough to escape from this year's Second Division is a long way short of being able to survive in the First next season.

Leicester, who had edged to the top of the table with a midweek draw at home to Swansea, went to Upton Park and were demolished by West Ham, who are Saturday's visitors to Kenilworth Road.

GOOD RUN

Alan Young put the visitors ahead, but the Hammers extended their unbeaten run to eight matches with a second-half recovery which brought goals from Geoff Pike, David Cross and Pat Holland.

Chelsea's chance to return to the top ended with a performance described by manager Geoff Hurst as one of their worst of the season as they lost 0-3 against Bristol Rovers. He promised team changes for Saturday's home game against Cardiff.

Chelsea's notorious followers lived up to their reputation with fighting on

the terrace, a couple of stabbings, several arrests and a rampage through Bristol's shopping centre.

VANISHED

Former leaders Newcastle dropped a place, to fifth when they vanished with hardly a murmur at Shrewsbury. Unbeaten at home, Newcastle slumped to their fifth successive away defeat and are badly missing skipper Mick Martin who has been out with knee ligament trouble since being injured in the match at Kenilworth Road.

Shrewsbury were cruising happily, three up, before Newcastle's late reply, a penalty by Alan Shoulder his 18th goal of the season.

Birmingham moved up to fourth place, to join the Town, Chelsea and Newcastle on 36 points with a game in hand. After a midweek 0-0 draw at Newcastle they beat Wrexham 2-0, and QPR also forced their way back into the reckoning when they won 3-0 at Preston.

Match Details

SUNDERLAND 1, LUTON TOWN 0
Half-time: 0-0

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

SUNDERLAND: Turner; Whitworth, Hinnigan, Clarke, Hindmarch; Elliott (Dunn, 45 mins), Arnott, Marangoni; Cooke, Robson, Cummins.

THE GOAL: John Cooke, his first league goal, when left unmarked beyond the far post in the 61st minute to meet a deep cross by Kevin Arnott.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town six saved and five off target, Sunderland three saved and four off target.

ENTERTAINMENT: Too tense to produce flowing football for a long time, but with the Town very much in the game and well worth a point but for some excellent goalkeeping by Sunderland's Chris Turner.

ATTENDANCE: 25,387—the biggest for any Town match anywhere this season, and the goal came after 15 minutes of solid roaring encouragement.

REFEREE: Ray Chadwick, Darwen, Lancs—another good one, with only slight suspicions that the crowd affected some of the tight decisions.

FOUR-GOAL SOLO EARNS A DRAW

GODFREY INGRAM 4,
BARTON RESERVES 4

NO APOLOGIES for the score-line. Godfrey Ingram, rather than the whole of the Luton Town Youth team, stole a point off Barton Rovers Reserves in a sensational Wallspan Alliance showpiece game at Kenilworth Road on Friday night.

The young Town side looked dead and buried by half-time when Barton had taken a 4-0 lead, looking quicker and sharper in every department. Then Ingram came out for the second half to turn on a sensational solo, cutting Barton's defence to pieces with deft footwork and brilliant finishing power to score four times and rescue a point for his team.

He raced through the middle to score with Luton's first shot of the match in the 50th minute, cracked one in with his left six minutes later, and reduced the deficit to one when he again squirmed through the defence on his own to smack in Luton's third in the 65th

minute. Ten minutes from the end he struck a fourth time with a tremendous left-foot drive over the Barton wall from a free kick.

All this overshadowed the complete dominance of Barton in the first half when they had outplayed Luton. New signing from Tring, Bernie Mapp, marked his debut in Barton's colours with a cracking goal in the 11th minute. Ron Lawson followed up with a brace in the 12th and 36th minutes and young Steve Harris scored the fourth three minutes from the break. Mapp and Lawson were substituted at half time to save them for the first team game against Hornchurch on Saturday, and in their absence Ingram took charge.

The game was designed to attract newcomers to the Wallspan League and must have impressed watchers from Hitchin, Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted.

It is not a youth league as such, but the Town use it mainly for match experience for their youngsters, and their next big date is this afternoon at Wolverhampton in the second leg of the Midland Youth League Cup semi-final.

They face a hard battle after being held 1-1 in the home leg, at Vauxhall's ground. The young Wolves looked slightly sharper for much of the game, and Rob Walker had to make good saves in the first half to keep the score-sheet blank.

Andy Pearson broke the deadlock four minutes after the break, with a cheeky goal—Mick Small sent him down the left wing, and as the Wolves defenders waited for Pearson to pull the ball back he took them all by surprise with a low drive into the net from a difficult angle.

Small hit the woodwork twice, but the Town's luck was even worse at the other end. Wolves carried more threat than positive action in the penalty area, but John Woodward and Walker got in a tangle in the 67th minute and Atkinson equalised after Woodward's headed back-pass had been dropped by Walker.