

**FIVE
IN THE
RACE**

DESPITE their best Easter for years, the Town are still one of the outsiders in the race for promotion, down to fifth place, two points adrift of the top three.

The Easter programme has begun to sort out some of the men from the boys, and the eight teams who have battled in close formation for so long are now realistically reduced to five, with Sunderland, Birmingham and Chelsea the three favourites, edging clear of Leicester and the Town.

The Town went into Easter in seventh place when QPR overtook them with a vital 2-0 win at Chelsea. Friday's win over Charlton pushed the Town back up to third, which they held after the victory over Watford and the draw at Chelsea.

But they dropped two places on Tuesday night when Sunderland went to the top for the first time this season. They rounded off a perfect Easter by winning 2-1 at Shrewsbury who are Saturday's visitors to Kenilworth Road.

Sunderland beat Newcastle 1-0 on Saturday, and followed up with a similar result at Wrexham on Monday. They have timed their finishing burst to a nicety—in their first 17 away matches they managed only one win. Now, as well as having the Second Division's only unbeaten home record they have chalked up three consecutive away wins.

The most vital result of the lot may be the one from Filbert Street on Saturday—Leicester beat Chelsea 1-0 to move into fourth place, and are just a point behind the leading three after winning 1-0 at Cardiff on Tuesday.



● **TONY'S DOUBLE:** Paddy Grealish, extreme left, hammers in the Town's goal at Stamford Bridge, his second of the Easter holiday. His first ever goal for the Town came at Charlton on Friday.

Hatton strikes for a derby double

IN VIEW of the drama that was to follow at Stamford Bridge 48 hours later, Town supporters showed considerable good judgment, as they whistled loud and long to try to persuade the referee to ring down the curtain on Saturday's derby game with Watford.

The Town had shown both sides of their nature in a strange mixture of a match. At times in the first half they were brilliant and could have been three

or four goals up. In the end they might easily have dropped another home point and done mortal damage to the promotion bid.

On balance, I thought the Town deserved to complete the double over a Watford side still struggling to get used to the Second Division after two successive promotion campaigns.

Watford are at the sort of stage the Town were experiencing a year ago, with a major shake-up in staff barely complete.

At times they looked like a bunch of individuals who still haven't got to know each other very well, and it was to their credit that they kept in the game for so long.

When the Town opened up in a first-half performance which brought an ovation at half-time, Watford looked ready to be slaughtered.

The defence looked rock solid after an early scare in which Ray Train got down Watford's left wing and sent an angled shot wide of the far post.

Alan West and Tony Grealish ran the game from midfield, and Steve Sims and Ian Bolton had a terrible time as Bob Hatton and Brian Stein tormented them on the ground.

David Moss wasted the best early chance the Town created, going through beautifully in pursuit of a through-ball from Ricky Hill. His pace took him clear, but he pulled the shot wide.

That was in the 12th minute, but three minutes later Hatton more than made amends. West broke down the left wing and from his cross Grealish tried to shoot at goal. He was half-tackled, but the ball bounced kindly for the Town and Hatton calmly notched his 16th goal of the season, his third in three matches.

Watford had to struggle as the Town showed every sign of running up a cricket score, with Mal Donaghy and Kirk Stephens pressing forward to back up attacks.

One move went the length of the field, involving Donaghy, Hatton, Stein and Moss, but Hatton headed Moss's centre over the bar, and then put a shot wide from a chance created by Donaghy and Stein.

It was one-way traffic and Eric Steele had to make the save of the match to keep out another drive by Hatton. The corner produced a frantic scramble in which Moss and Hill both had shots cleared off the line.

Significantly, Jake Findlay's only serious work in the first half was to halt a Watford break, when he raced out of his area to head clear and prevent Luther Blissett reaching a long clearance.

Inexplicably, the Town lost their smooth rhythm after the break, and referee John Martin played a part with some astonishing decisions.

Watford opened up in the search for an equaliser and Findlay had to make

a top-class save to save the day when Train put Malcolm Poskett through. Good as the save was, Poskett really should have made the chance count.

Mr Martin's incessant whistling, often for offences which only he saw, helped to provoke a little niggles as Watford tried to get back into the game. Mike Saxby was booked for obstruction on Train, while Moss and Mick Henderson got involved in a far more serious scuffle and were let off with a lecture.

Wilf Rostron also collected a booking, but Saxby's was the most serious, because it put him on 28 disciplinary points, and the next yellow card could well mean a three-match ban.

With 25 minutes to go Moss was taken off, still suffering from an ankle injury, with Mark Aizlewood going on at left back and Donaghy moving into midfield.

The Watford substitution looked like a belated admission that Saxby and Paul Price had more than matched the central thrusts of Poskett and Blissett. The lanky Ross Jenkins was put on in place of full-back Harrison, and in the end Watford went close to snatching a point.

Blissett was left unmarked to meet a cross from Rostron, but sent his header over the bar.

And the nearest thing to another goal came at the other end when Hatton still found the energy in the 88th minute to gallop down the flank and deliver another lovely cross. Stein's flying header was worth a goal, but Steele made a good save.

It turned out that the first-half supremacy had been enough to take the points, and Town boss David Pleat said: "I think we deserved it."

Watford manager Graham Taylor declined to talk to reporters, saying that while relegation was still a threat he did not want to say anything that might increase the pressure on his players.

"He probably can't think up any more excuses for losing," said one of the scribes who had followed Watford all season—Saturday was their 16th defeat in 36 matches.

WATFORD DETAILS

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

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West, Stein, Hatton, Moss (Aizlewood 65 mins).

WATFORD: Steele; Henderson, Harrison (Jenkins 72 mins), Sims, Bolton; Patching, Booth, Train; Poskett, Blissett, Rostron.

THE GOAL: Bob Hatton, 15 minutes, his 16th of the season following a run and cross by Alan West.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town nine saved and five off target; Watford two saved and nine off target.

ATTENDANCE: 12,783—and would have been 3,000 higher if tickets had been made available for sale on the day of the game.

ENTERTAINMENT: Lovely first half, but the Town lost their poise after the break.

REFEREE: John Martin, Alton, Hants—the man who arrived at Plymouth for a 7.30 match which kicked off at 3 pm. That was Plymouth FC's fault. Having seen Mr Martin they're not so daft... he had an off day.

BOOKINGS: Mike Saxby for obstruction on Ray Train, which probably takes him to 28 disciplinary points; Wilf Rostron for a foul on Mal Donaghy.

ROBBING THE POOR—AND IT'S EASY

THE MANAGER unkindly castigated one part of the Town's performance at The Valley on Friday as "rubbish." They had roared into a two-goal lead in the first 12 minutes, then taken it easy until half-time as it became clear that relegation-doomed Charlton had almost nothing to offer in any department.

A few words of wisdom at half-time apparently rectified matters as the Town chalked up their biggest away win since Harry Haslam's days, when they won 4-1 at Cardiff in October 1977.

Charlton's newly appointed manager Mike Bailey stated the obvious when he talked about a lack of confidence among his players, and for him a spellbinding killer goal by Alan West was a double blow—Bailey had worked as assistant coach with Minnesota Kicks to see West's abilities at first hand.

Even when they were at half-pace the Town looked a class above Charlton, and well worth their first away win since Boxing Day.

David Moss returned, and celebrated with his 23rd goal of the season, his ninth penalty in the eighth minute. He started the move with a square pass in midfield to Tony Grealish and as Brian Stein's

trickery put the Charlton goal under threat Lawrie Madden brought him down. "Mossie is back", chanted the delighted Town following as the penalty went unerringly into the usual spot, past Nicky Johns's right hand.

Grealish, Ricky Hill and West were tearing great holes through Charlton's four-man defensive formation and the second goal took only another four minutes to arrive.

It started with Paul Price making a clearance. Bob Hatton won the ball, and went on a run down the right wing, leaving Tony Hazell stranded. Stein's header from the centre was beaten out by Johns, Grealish tried a shot from the rebound which was blocked, and as the ball went loose towards the flank Moss flicked it back into the centre and Grealish darted in to head his first league goal as a Town player—his tally at Orient was ten in 169 matches.

It was, as Mr Pleat observed later, a little bit of Robin Hood, except that here the Town were robbing the poor to try to get rich.

Yet the pace and control slipped

for a time. Jake Findlay had to make a hurried save to keep out a far post header from Derek Hales, and an unlucky offside robbed Martin Robinson in the 24th minute when he netted from a low cross by Hales.

A Charlton goal at that stage might have transformed the match, and forced the Town to open up again, but in the event the Londoners' attacking carried little real threat even when they had an equal share of the play.

They must have hoped for an early break in the second half, but instead West lashed in a goal to remember in the 48th minute. A headed clearance dropped to him about ten yards outside the penalty area. West let the ball bounce once, then hammered a shot on the volley into the net. I haven't seen a goal hit with such force since the days of Malcolm Macdonald or Bert Mitchell, and it was the end for Charlton.

West hit a similar one in the 84th minute, but this time a defender got in the way, leaving Hatton the chance to make it 4-0, and although Hales got a consolation for Charlton a minute later the Town's supremacy was never in doubt.

Charlton details

CHARLTON ATH 1, LUTON TOWN 4
Half-time: 0-2

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

CHARLTON: Johns; Shaw, Madden, Hazell, Berry; Tydeman, Powell, Gritt, Walker; Hales, Robinson. Sub: Smith, not used.

THE GOALS: David Moss, penalty, eight minutes, after Madden tripped Brian Stein; Tony Grealish, his first for the Town, 12 minutes, header from Moss's flick; Alan West, super-goal, 48 minutes, right foot volley from almost 30 yards; Bob Hatton, 84 minutes, from rebound after another West special had been blocked; Derek Hales for Charlton, 85 minutes.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved, six wide; Charlton five saved, six off target, one disallowed for offside.

ATTENDANCE: 8,971—well above Charlton's average, thanks to a big following from Luton.

REFEREE: Colin Downey, Middlesex—produced a very good performance.

ENTERTAINMENT: Apart from a first-half flat patch, when the Town were strolling through the game, it was lovely for Luton eyes to watch. Charlton didn't look Third Division... more like Fourth.

BOOKINGS: Mal Donaghy for dissent; Derek Hales for a foul on Paul Price.