

But it's agony in injury time at Stamford Bridge

FIVE POINTS out of six was what manager David Pleat wanted from the Easter games to revive the Town's promotion drive. It was a tall order by his own admission. But they did it—and only a cruel stroke of luck in the 91st minute at Chelsea on Monday prevented the Town chalking up three wins in a row for the first time this season.

Most teams would be delighted to come away with a point from Stamford Bridge, against a side rated as one of the favourites to go up. Yet after being in the lead for over an hour, the Town felt as if they had failed when a deflected shot gave Chelsea their only point from three Easter games.

The scene in the penalty area, with the electronic scoreboard showing that 90 minutes was already up, summed up the two faces of football.

Chelsea had battered away at a resolute Town defence, and greeted their last-gasp qualiser with the kind of celebrations normally seen when the winner is scored at Wembley.

As they danced around the pitch and kissed each other, half a dozen Town players lay in misery on the turf, staggered, stunned and bewildered that such a thing could happen when the game was all but over.

You could sense their misery from the stand, and share in it when you thought about how important one more point could be by May 3.

Equally, it was hard to begrudge Chelsea, because the Town had been on the defensive for the whole of the second half, in which not one shot troubled the unpredictable Peter Borota in the Chelsea goal.

And manager Geoff Hurst was convinced that his erratic goalkeeper was directly responsible for Chelsea falling behind in the first place.

With two wins behind them, the Town looked much the more confident combination in the first half, although Bob Hatton and Brian Stein were marked closely.

David Moss, whose appearance later looked like a calculated risk gone wrong, could make little headway, and a heavy tackle by Gary Chivers early in the second half helped to fashion a Town decision to play a containing game.

Chelsea had one good early move, when Ian Britton got through for a shot after collecting a headed clearance by Mike Saxby. Jake Findlay went down to make a difficult and vital save, and injured himself in the process.

It was the only mistake Saxby made all afternoon, and he and Paul Price were so dominant in the centre of the defence that Tommy Langley's height and weight produced no real threat, and Colin Lee was reduced to niggling fouls in the

THE TOP TEAMS

Sunderland	37	19	9	9	58	38	47
Birmingham	37	19	9	9	51	32	47
Chelsea	38	21	5	12	60	50	47
Leicester	37	17	12	8	51	35	46
Luton Town	38	15	15	8	62	42	45
QPR	38	16	11	11	66	47	43
Newcastle	38	15	13	10	49	41	43
West Ham	35	17	6	12	45	35	40

attempt to unsettle a well-organised rearguard.

The Town were confident and composed in mid-field as well, and the consistent Alan West set up their goal in the 25th minute. A high clearance dropped to him just inside the Chelsea half, and he controlled the ball instantly and set off towards the penalty area.

Chelsea defenders held off, and West passed to Tony Grealish. He has a habit of knocking shots with more hope than belief from outside the box, but this time, from about 25 yards, he hit a swerving drive which left Borota unable to do more than palm the ball into the corner of the net.

The Town gave Clive Walker too much space for my liking, but escaped when Lee led a Chelsea break and slotted the ball through the middle. Walker had the speed to race clear, but then blasted a great chance wide.

It turned out to be typical of Chelsea's failings. The Town made fewer strikes at goal, but half of them forced Borota into action.

Findlay's save from Britton in the seventh minute turned out to be the first and last direct shot he had to take.

When Moss departed to make way for Mark Aizlewood eight minutes after the interval, the Town went into a 4-4-2 formation, with Aizlewood playing at left-back and Mal Donaghy bolstering the midfield.

WASTED

Donaghy did another tremendous job, but with the front line almost non-existent in the second-half Chelsea put on ever-increasing pressure.

They had ten shots at goal in the second half, not one of which was on target, with Britton and Viljoen wasting the best two.

Saxby was injured and had to have treatment

midway through the half, and referee Tom Bune had several times warned Town players that he would add on time to punish delaying tactics.

My stop watch showed 35 seconds over the 90 minutes had been played when the long defensive battle ended. Saxby was ruled to have reached a hopeful cross to give Chelsea their sixth corner of the second half.

For the record, he says he didn't touch the ball that time.

Chelsea pushed every single man into the Town's half—even Borota was on the half-way line jumping around like a demented puppet. The corner produced an amazing scramble, with perhaps 20 players trying to get a foot to the

ball, and after several agonising seconds Lee got in a shot which deceived Findlay because it caught a deflection off Donaghy's shin.

Chelsea will surely never see a more welcome sight: they almost had to rub their eyes to make sure the ball really was in the net before erupting with delight, matched by a roar of relief from the packed Shed.

NICE, BUT . . .

"I thought the result was right," said their manager. "We deserved nothing from the first half, and everything from the second. Luton played some nice stuff in the middle of the park, but apart from their goal they didn't do much else in the penalty area."

CHELSEA DETAILS

CHELSEA 1, LUTON TOWN 1

Half-time: 0-1 79/80

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Donaghy, Saxby, Price; Grealish, Hill, West; Stein, Hatton, Moss (Aizlewood, 53 minutes).

CHELSEA: Borota; Chivers, Rofe (Fillery, 78 minutes), Pates, Nutton; Viljoen, Britton, Harris; Lee, Langley, Walker.

THE GOALS: Tony Grealish for the Town, 25-yard cracker, with goalkeeper Petar Borota at fault according to Chelsea boss Geoff Hurst; Colin Lee for Chelsea, 35 seconds into injury time, after terrific scramble in a crowded penalty area.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town five saved and five off target; Chelsea one saved and 13 off target.

ATTENDANCE: 28,078 — not bad for a side that had lost its two previous matches.

REFEREE: Tom Bune, Surrey—kept firm control and it was tough on the Town that his stopwatch was not running fast.

ENTERTAINMENT: Fascinating battle of wits and tactics, with Chelsea highly relieved to snatch a point after controlling the second half without putting Jake Findlay under critical pressure.

BRIGHT SPOT: Five points out of six over Easter. It needs a long memory to recall when the Town last achieved that.