

'YOU'LL GO UP!'— BLACKBURN BOSS

PERFECTLY POISED to use Easter as the next stepping-stone to promotion, Luton Town this week convinced another rival manager that they are the best team in the Second Division.

Bobby Saxton had seen his Blackburn side opt for power and physical effort because they didn't fancy a contest of sheer skill. And they went home beaten on two counts — the Town were just as determined as the visitors, and produced the flair when it mattered.

"Luton could have scored a couple more," admitted Saxton, who had fallen victim to the classic dilemma every manager faces on a visit to Kenilworth Road.

With lingering promotion ambitions of their own, Blackburn had to be more positive than the teams who come with a determination not to be beaten.

On paper, with the strongest defence in the division — until the Town's two goals — they were well equipped to compete for three points.

They were well organised at the back, resolute in midfield, and quick on the break. But the Town still looked the better side throughout.

Noel Brotherston, often Blackburn's attacking danger man in past games, was blotted out by Kirk Stephens, and ruefully said afterwards that he was among those who had voted for Stephens as right-back in the PFA's Second Division side. "I was right, wasn't I?" he said.

Brotherston had only one chance, early in the second half, when Jake Findlay had to make a spreading save to prevent an equaliser, but the rest of Blackburn's shooting was off target or wildly optimistic.

"Plenty of physical effort and not enough good passing of the ball," was Saxton's criticism of his side. "You can't get by on sheer effort against teams like Luton."

He might have added that the Town more than matched Blackburn for effort and persistence in every department, without reaching the peaks we have seen at times this season.

There was a hint of nervousness, lifted in the 27th minute when Glenn Keeley and Derek Fazackerley, possibly the best centre-back pairing in the Division, were bamboozled by Brian Stein and Steve White.

PUNTED

Findlay punted a long clearance downfield and Stein competed in the air with Fazackerley. It should have been an unequal contest, yet Stein's airborne challenge prevented the towering defender getting clean contact with the ball.

His header glanced off and White, quicker on the uptake than his critics on the terraces, immediately headed the ball on, over and to the right of Fazackerley.

Stein did the rest, with pace taking him clear of

Report by Brian Swain Pictures: Mark Richards

Keeley and confident control taking him around goalkeeper Terry Gennoe before the shot was placed carefully into the net from an angle.

From then on Blackburn threatened little as the Town's midfield and defence came out to play.

Clive Goodyear powered a header narrowly wide from a corner and early in the second half Stein showed Blackburn how skill can always outweigh power and effort.

He robbed Keeley on the edge of the penalty area, twinkled down to the by-line and pulled the ball back to set up a perfect chance. White swung hurriedly and failed to make contact, and Ricky Hill, behind him, hit a first-time shot wide.

Some of the crowd were



● KILLER GOAL: Steve White hammers in the shot that finished off Blackburn as the Town went two up with 20 minutes to go.

howling for White's removal when that happened, but it turned out to be the start of the Town's match-winning spell.

Hill and White organised a two-man raid which ended with White beating his man and hammering a drive past Gennoe and on to the underside of the bar.

Ten minutes later, with 20 minutes to go, White hit the goal he deserved, and it was another cracker. He took a pass from Stephens, turned his man and shot low into the net for his 17th goal of the season, and the end of a run of nine games without scoring.

It was party-piece time after that, with Billy Jennings getting into the act as substitute when Ricky Hill, carrying an ankle injury, was taken off.

RULED OUT

Jennings proved that he still has plenty to offer after being released by Orient, and netted in the final minute from a pass by David Moss.

It looked a good goal to just about everybody, including the linesman, but referee Alf Grey ruled that Moss was offside and interfering with play as the shot was made.

Earlier this year Mr Grey made a worse mistake at the same end when he denied Swindon a goal in a cup-tie, so perhaps we ought not to complain too much.

Town manager David Pleat believes Mr Grey was right this time, and took quiet pleasure from the victory. "It was a powerful game, rather than deft and delicate," he said. "But I always thought we were the more likely side to score, although Blackburn deserve credit for having a go."

"I was pleased with all our side — they were up against a good team and they were deserving winners."

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2
BLACKBURN ROVERS 0

Half-time: 1-0

81/82

TOWN: Findlay; Stephens, Goodyear, Donaghy, Money; Hill (Jennings, 75 mins), Horton, Turner; Stein, White, Moss.

BLACKBURN: Gennoe; Branagan, Keeley, Fazackerley, Rathbone; Miller, Speight, Stonehouse; Bell, Garner (Hamilton 75 mins), Brotherston.

THE GOALS: Brian Stein gem, 27 minutes, solo run and angled shot after being put through by Steve White; White, 70 minutes, sharp turn and shot just inside the area from pass by Kirk Stephens.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town three saved, six wide, one hit the bar, and late "goal" by Billy Jennings ruled out because David Moss was offside; Blackburn six blocked and six wide. Corners: 7-7.

REFEREE: Alf Grey, Great Yarmouth—found it an easy game to control, and on the late disallowed effort he was sharper than his linesman.

ENTERTAINMENT: Too much reliance on physical effort, particularly by Blackburn, stopped it being a classic, but it was still good to watch.

ATTENDANCE: 10,721 — sounds pathetic for the top team in the division, but it was the day's highest in Division Two although Barnsley had 23,059 the night before for a local derby with Rotherham.