Verdict on the Town's week ★★

CUP DREAM IS A NIGHTMARE

LUTON TOWN 0, ROTHERHAM 2
(After extra time. 90-minute score 0-1. Aggregate result Town 3, Rotherham 4)

REPORT by BRIAN SWAIN
PICTURES: MARK RICHARDS

WEAKENED BY injuries and Paul Walsh's suspension, the Town slumped to their first home defeat of the season on Tuesday night. Middling Third Division side Rotherham succeeded with stunning efficiency where Southampton had failed on Saturday to knock the Town out of the Milk Cup.

They had to battle for 107 minutes before scoring the second goal that clinched it, with Town supporters left to ponder on the indescretion of Paul Walsh three weeks ago that now looks like the real turning point.

When he was sent off at Millmoor the Town were two up and looked capable of hitting another three or four. Rotherham started their revival on their own pitch in the second half of the first leg, and completed it in Luton this week.

Excuses are almost too easy: David Moss was out through injury, and Walsh's skill was missed. "If they had been playing we would probably have been paralysed," said Rotherham boss George Kerr.

Yet Ray Daniel, 18, playing only his second match at top level, could have considered it an impressive home debut if the score-line had been less unpleasant.

Brian Stein tried hard to lift his attack, but even he found it hard to complete good work with shots and headers on target.

And the crushing final straw was that the Town's defence, so rarely under consistent pressure, crumbled twice, caught flat-footed when Rotherham scored in the 35th minute, and lost through lack of concentration at a corner when the winner was scored.

A long punt downfield by the goalkeeper led to Phil Walker racing through to tie the aggregate at 3-3, and Kevin Kilmore headed the winner in the second period of extra time.

The Town simply didn't hit their true form, perhaps as a result of Saturday's stupendous efforts.

Rotherham, busy and determined, played above themselves, defended stoutly when they had to, and clearly believed in themselves.

"We came to enjoy ourselves, knowing that we might as well have a go," said their manager. "We knew it needed two goals to win. We got stuck in and worked hard, and we deserved to win."

DETAILS

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Donaghy, Turner; Hill, Horton, Antic, Daniel; Stein, Aylott. Sub: Mark Stein, not used.

ROTHERHAM: Stevenson; Forrest, Johnson, Stone, Crosby; McEwan, Gooding, Mitchell; Kilmore, Walker, Raynes (Rhodes, 105 mins).

THE GOALS: Phil Walker, 35 minutes; Kevin Kilmore, 107 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town ten saved and 12 off target; Rotherham six saved and six wide. Corners: 13-6 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 6,755, lowest of the season.

ENTERTAINMENT: Worst of the season for Town supporters.

REFEREE: Keren Barratt, Coventry.

● **PENALTY SHOUT: The moment when the Town thought Rotherham should have been on the spot, with Gerry Forrest trapping the ball between himself and the post following a corner.**

● **SO NEAR: Mal Donaghy is up with the attack as the Town pile on second-half pressure in Tuesday's cup-tie.**