

POSITIVE SPIRIT IS SUNDAY BEST

BEATEN manager Ron Wylie found it hard to analyse why Luton Town moved back into the top six of the First Division so easily against West Brom at Kenilworth Road on Sunday.

One of his best players had been sent off. He thought his side should have been awarded a penalty. As they weren't, he couldn't understand why the same ref had given one to the Town.

But at least he had the good grace to realise that even the neutral Pressmen he was talking to knew that the better side had won, and decided: "I won't make any excuses."

The Town were already two up when Martin Jol was sent off and only goalkeeper Paul Barron denied them the two extra goals they wanted to overtake Coventry on goal difference in the league table.

Town manager David Pleat had seen his side under no pressure at all during the 90 minutes. "The way we were playing we would have beaten them with 11 men," he said. "The score was about right."

Referee Michael Taylor seemed to be a little fussy at times, but even Jol knew what to expect in the 67th minute when he produced a rash tackle on Brian Horton.

He had been booked an hour earlier, and was turning towards the tunnel before

Mr Taylor reached for his book to note the second transgression.

By their standards West Brom were on their Sunday best behaviour. Physical strength and hard tackling has become a feature of their game, and their apparent determination to avoid defeat, rather than look for victory, made it a difficult match for the Town.

Justice was done when speed of passing and flair and invention in attacking earned its reward against a side that concentrated so much on stopping opponents.

The West Brom attack, with Cyril Regis playing his first game for eight weeks after injury, rarely threatened to upset the Town's defence, and they had only one shot on target in the whole match, a second-half drive by

Tony Morley which Les Sealey dealt with.

The good forward-moving football all came from the Town, though at times there were hints of over-elaboration.

Ray Daniel, emerging as a real prospect as a left-sided midfielder, had a sparkling first half, and was one of several chopped down as West Brom drew battle lines just outside their penalty area.

But they got the place wrong when Noel Luke and Romeo Zondervan tried to catch up as Daniel burst through down the inside left position four minutes before the interval.

All three went down in a heap, and Mr Taylor, who had denied Regis's penalty claims when he and Paul Elliott tumbled three

minutes earlier, had no doubts about this one.

Brian Horton became the Town's third penalty-taker of the season, and the first not to miss, and West Brom never looked like recovering.

Barron saved a 30-yarder from Mal Donaghy as the Town drove forward, but was left helpless by a superb goal from Trevor Aylott in the 64th minute. Daniel gave him half an opening with another good run and pass down the left, and Aylott's flighted curling shot into the top far corner was perfection.

Jol was sent off three minutes later, and West Brom seemed to sit back in defence and wait hopelessly for the final whistle.

They flinched a couple of

times as Paul Walsh and Brian Stein went close, and with Ricky Hill well up in support it was a one-way finale.

Walsh had one shot deflected narrowly wide and then saw a neat chip finger-tipped over the bar, and Barron made the save of the match from another rasping drive by Donaghy.

And while Mr Wylie couldn't bring himself to say anything about the Town's performance, Mr Pleat had a word of sympathy for the banished Jol. "I feel a bit sorry for him, because it was nothing violent," said the Luton manager.

"Jol was lucky," said a West Brom Pressman softly. "I wish I could have gone home 20 minutes early."



● BELOW: Ray Daniel tumbles . . . ● ABOVE: Brian Horton despatches the penalty.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 WEST BROM 0

Half-time: 1-0

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Donaghy, Thomas; Hill, Horton, Daniel; Stein, Aylott, Walsh. Sub: Antic, not needed.

WEST BROM: Barron; Zondervan, McNaught, Forsyth, Cowdrill; Luke, Jol, Lewis, Morley; Regis, Cross. Sub: Perry, not used.

THE GOALS. Brian Horton, penalty, 41 minutes, after Ray Daniel was brought down; Trevor Aylott, 64 minutes, curling drive into far corner from the edge of the box.

OTHER STRIKES: Town, six saved and eight wide; West Brom, one saved, three wide. Corners. 8 - 6 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 11,566, which made the Sunday experiment worthwhile, even if nearly 400 did insist on their right to free admission. It was 800 higher than for West Brom's visit last season.

REFEREE: Michael Taylor, Dover. West Brom thought he was a homer.

BOOKED. Paul Elliott for a foul on Regis, Martin Jol for a foul on Ricky Hill, Nicky Cross for a foul on Les Sealey and Paul Barron for dissent.

SENT OFF: Martin Jol, 67th minute, for his second bookable foul, on Brian Horton. Lucky to stay on: Paul Barron, whose dissent included bad language.

ENTERTAINMENT: Not a classic, but the Town did well to beat a side which seemed to want nothing more than to avoid a hiding.

