

Old year ends with a chilling blast at Roker

ONE early attack which produced two shots was the sum total of the danger the Town posed at Roker Park as they ended the old year with a defeat which was far more emphatic than the score-line suggests.

Weakened by injuries before and during the game, they fell victim to a Sunderland side which started slowly but got steadily more powerful and confident as the Town faltered.

The all-round team performance was never competitive enough in the second half, when Sunderland were backed by a chilling gale and a roaring crowd that sensed the Town might be intimidated.

DISTRESS SIGNALS

Warnings of gale force 10 conditions were being broadcast on Wearside as the Town's distress got worse, and the two goals Sunderland scored were no less than they deserved, even if one was a present from a defensive mistake.

There was a turning point in each half, with one goal chance missed early in the first, and the vital first goal conceded early in the second.

With the gale behind them the Town had the better of the first half-hour. They looked neat and composed, with Sunderland's attacks being held easily.

It looked as though the classic style of defend with care and hit hard on the break could bring the desired result. Sunderland and their crowd showed signs of being frustrated as Brian Horton marshalled things in midfield and defence, and Paul Elliott and Mal Donaghy looked a class above their opponents.

ROUND THE POST

In the seventh minute Ricky Hill's through-ball, after a run out of defence, split the Sunderland back four and Paul Walsh raced through. Goalkeeper Chris Turner did well to advance to cut down the angle, and forced Walsh's shot round a post.

The corner was half-cleared and Horton cracked in a 25-yarder which Turner gathered.

Perhaps that flurry stung Sunderland. But they were never in real danger after that.

They muscled their way into domination, and some of the tackling was fierce as physical power was used to make an impression.

Leighton James threatened to take the Town's left flank apart with a mixture of speed and spite, collected one booking, then faded quickly.

SUNDERLAND	2
LUTON TOWN	0
(Half-time: 0-0)	

An injury left him sitting in the dressing room at half-time, but the calming influence of sub Pop Robson proved to be more effective than all of James's flash threats.

With two full-backs, Kirk Stephens and Mitchell Thomas ruled out through injury, disaster hit a third when Rob Johnson, who had been playing with calm authority, was hurt in the 53rd minute.

OFF FOR TREATMENT

He was off having treatment when Robson fed Paul Bracewell on Sunderland's right-flank, and from his long diagonal cross defender Gordon Chisholm headed a goal, from the position Johnson would have been covering on the far post.

Raddy Antic went on as sub and Horton went to right-back, and for the rest of the game it was a fight to prevent humiliation.

Sunderland took over midfield completely and within six minutes had accepted a simple second goal. Wayne Turner, at left-back, tried to exchange passes with Ray Daniel in his own penalty area.

COULD HAVE CLEARED

Either could have put the ball into the stand. Neither did, and Nick Pickering intercepted and crashed a drive into the net from near the edge of the box.

Paul Walsh made a couple of promising runs, Hill showed some clever individual skill and Elliott made certain £500,000 debut striker Lee Chapman had a blank day.

But all the Town fans had to cheer about was a succession of saves by Les Sealey as Sunderland and their crowd whipped up a storm of attacking.

MATCH DETAILS

TOWN: Sealey; Johnson (Antic, 36 mins), Elliott, Donaghy, Turner; Hill, Horton, Daniel, Bunn; Walsh Stein.

SUNDERLAND: Turner; Venison, Atkins, Chisholm, Elliott; Bracewell, Proctor, Pickering, James (Robson, 45 mins); Chapman, West.

THE GOALS: Chisholm, 53 mins; Pickering, 56 mins. Other strikes: Town two saved and four wide. Sunderland ten saved, nine off target. Corners 8-6 to Sunderland.

ATTENDANCE: 19,402. Roker Park's second highest of the season, despite bitterly cold kale force winds.

REFEREE: Arthur Robinson, Haddcliffe, Manchester.

BOOKED: Leighton James of Sunderland for a word out of place; Paul Walsh and Brian Horton for dissent, Brian Stein and Mal Donaghy for fouls.

ENTERTAINMENT: Great for the home fans. Painful for the handful of Luton followers.