

PATCHED-UP TEAM HAS ITS DESERVED REWARD

WITH relief competing with pleasure at the result, the faithful few at Kenilworth Road on Tuesday night saluted the final whistle for two reasons: it was Luton Town's first home win of 1984, and it came after Ipswich had given the Town an anxious finale.

Relegation - threatened shadows of the skilful and entertaining Ipswich teams we have seen in the past, Bobby Ferguson's men looked resigned to their fate after Trevor Aylott scored twice.

But they pulled a goal back seven minutes from the end, and you could feel a chilling fear on a wintry night spreading around Kenilworth Road. Ipswich deserved no reward, yet the way things have gone for the Town since Christmas

an unexpected equaliser threatened to spoil everything.

Ipswich should never have been that close, because without turning on the sparkle a patched-up Town side had buckled down to work hard.

The visitors had the same idea without the same ability, and but for a succession of missed chances by the Town in the second half their sixth consecutive defeat would have been far heavier.

The background to the Town's overdue success made it all the more satisfying for their followers. Skipper Brian Horton and midfield colleague Ricky Hill were both out with injuries, and the Town had to

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use an experimental mixture in that department.

Raddy Antic was brought back for only his third full appearance of the season, Mal Donaghy was shifted out of defence to add the steel and bite that ought to have been needed, and Frank Bunn returned a month after being dropped.

It was the first time that trio had played together in the midfield formation, and perhaps we should all be grateful that Ipswich were not sharp enough to win control in that area, despite using four midfield men to the Town's three.

The Town were also grateful that Alan Sunderland, on loan from Highbury, is no longer the clinical finisher he used to be. Eric Gates put him through with the first clear chance of the game, in the sixth minute, and Les Sealey made an important save by sticking out a boot.

By contrast with the Town's varied attacking ideas, with Paul Walsh and Brian Stein willing as ever to run at defenders, and Aylott ploughing through everything, Ipswich were lacklustre.

But they did defend and cover well for a long time, and their manager Bobby Ferguson blamed a goal-keeping error for the 39th-minute goal that forced Ipswich to be more positive.

He should have admitted that central defender Russell Osman was having a bit of a nightmare against quick opponents who made him look as mobile as a steam-roller.

Walsh began the move with a run at the centre of Ipswich's defence. His pass

found Aylott on the edge of the penalty area, in the inside right position. Aylott turned a yard clear of Osman, and curled a superb chip into the net over Cooper, who could hardly believe the accuracy of the shot.

Kirk Stephens had to make a saving tackle when Sunderland nearly got through for a shot straight from the restart, but Ipswich couldn't find the same sort of defensive coolness in the 53rd minute when the clinching second goal arrived.

Clive Goodyear started it, breaking from defence, and giving Aylott the chance to move forward. His pass sent Bunn racing for goal in the inside left channel, Osman toppled him with a clumsy challenge and Aylott despatched the penalty with a minimum amount of fuss and the maximum amount of power and accuracy.

Ipswich wilted after that, and should have been ham-

pered. Walsh caught them on the break with a marvellous right wing run of 50 yards, but Stein managed to mistime his shot from the cross.

Cooper made a finger-tip save to keep out a rising drive by Stein, and Walsh put another chance wide as the Town drove forward through the falling snow.

But Ipswich regained hope and enthusiasm with seven minutes to go when the Town defence was caught overstretched as Sunderland and John Wark led a counter-attack. Wark did well to draw Sealey and toe-poke a pass beyond him, leaving Trevor Putney an open goal.

He scored and just for a few minutes confidence looked a problem for the Town, until Bunn and Walsh put one shot over and another wide, leaving Ipswich kidding themselves at the end that they had been close to their first away point of the year. They weren't really.

Match Details

LUTON TOWN 2 IPSWICH TOWN 1
Half-time: 2-0 83/84

TOWN: Sealey; Stephens, Elliott, Goodyear, Thomas; Antic, Donaghy, Bunn; Stein, Walsh, Aylott. Sub: Moss, not needed.

IPSWICH: Cooper; Burley, Osman, Butcher Barnes; Putney, Wark, McCall, Gates; Turner (Dozzell, 61 mins), Sunderland.

THE GOALS: Trevor Aylott twice for the Town, superb curled chip, 39 minutes; penalty, 53 minutes, after Russell Osman downed Frank Bunn; Trevor Putney for Ipswich, 83 minutes.

OTHER GOAL ATTEMPTS: Town four saved and seven wide; Ipswich five saved and seven wide. Corners: 7-3 to the Town.

ATTENDANCE: 8,776 lowest league gate of the season at Kenilworth Road, but on a very cold snowy night.

ENTERTAINMENT: Too much like hard work for two teams more desperate about the result than the manner in which it was gained, but the Town's patched-up side deserved to win.

REFEREE: Howard Taylor, Leicester—kept a tight grip on things throughout.