

Ref helps to create a spot of bother

THE bright promise from Old Trafford on Saturday was swamped at Hillsborough on Tuesday night when the Town slid out of the Milk Cup.

Some controversial refereeing left manager David Pleat and his players angry in defeat, but although a hat-trick of penalties helped to beat them the manager had to confess that on the night Sheffield Wednesday well deserved to win.

They earned their place in the quarter-finals with a performance typical of the style for which they have become famous. It was based on all out running, long passing, and aerial bombardment when attacking, and a well drilled off-side trap in defence.

Against that the Town never matched the form they had shown against Manchester Utd, and the attack was so powder-puff that Wednesday goalkeeper Martin Hodge didn't have a single shot to save until Steve Elliott put two past him in the last nine minutes.

The Town had looked cool and confident for the first 15 minutes, but everything changed when the crucial first goal arrived.

A long throw-in into the penalty area was back-

TUESDAY'S CUP-TIE AT HILLSBOROUGH

headed by Chapman and a linesman flagged to give Wednesday a penalty. It later turned out that Brian Stein had been adjudged to have pushed Chapman. Andy Blair scored from the spot, and from then on Wednesday's confidence soared while the Town's sagged.

The defence was under almost constant pressure and two of the young men who had such happy days at Old Trafford had miserable nights in the Sheffield rain. Stacey North's inexperience showed as the pressure grew, and Tim Breacker was found wanting as Sheffield's long ball attacks made ground down the wings.

But it was a night when more experienced men also failed to make their marks. The midfield was largely redundant, but the Town's tackling in all departments was below par.

A major problem was that the referee seemed to

see every challenge as a foul against the home side and in a hostile atmosphere generated by the crowd, the Town just about vanished as genuine contestants.

Brian Marwood snapped up the second goal after 32 minutes and Imre Varadi, all hustle and bustle, sent a flashing header wide when he should have scored.

Marwood and Gary Shelton gave Wednesday power on the wings which the Town lacked, and it was Shelton's efforts that brought the third goal, from another mystery penalty.

Mal Donaghy tried to block a hard cross by Shelton, the linesman decided the defender had used a hand, and Blair put his second penalty past Findlay's left hand.

And 18 minutes later Blair completed an astonishing hat-trick with the third penalty going to the same spot after North had tripped Shelton as the ball ran out of play.

The Town had introduced Garry Parker in place of Wayne Turner for the second half, but even his shooting was off the mark, and the late goals which made the scoreline look unrealistic were partly down to Wednesday manager Howard Wilkinson.

With 24 minutes to go he took off defender Lyons and sent on an extra forward, sub Chris Morris. "It back-fired" admitted Wilkinson. "I thought we could get more goals, and instead we left ourselves open at the back. Mind you, I only did it because we were four up and I knew we weren't going to lose."

Elliott fired in the first consolation goal in the 81st minute after collecting a long clearance from Micky Droy, and headed the second from Breacker's right wing run and cross four minutes later.

Match Details

SHEFFIELD WED 4 LUTON TOWN 2

HALF-TIME 2-0

TOWN: Findlay; Breacker, Droy, North, Donaghy; Hill, Turner (Parker 45 mins), Bunn; Stein, Elliott, Hilaire.

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY: Hodge; Oliver, Smith, Lyons (Morris 66 mins), Shirtliff; Worthington, Blair, Shelton; Marwood, Varadi, Chapman.

THE GOALS: Andy Blair, hat-trick of penalties 15, 52 and 70 minutes, and Brian Marwood 32 minutes for Wednesday. Steve Elliott two for the Town, 81 and 85 minutes.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved, three wide. Sheffield Wednesday seven saved, 11 wide. Corners: 10-1 to Wednesday

ATTENDANCE: 18,313 — below Wednesday's league average but the weather was foul.

ENTERTAINMENT: Very basic from Wednesday, but their long passes and off-side trap left the Town looking very much second best.

REFEREE: Tom Fitzharris, Bolton, slated by manager David Pleat as incompetent, and two of the three penalties he gave to the home side were complete mysteries to the crowd.