

AFTER PUTTING their supporters through agonies for the first half, Luton Town finally found a touch of First Division quality to snatch victory at Turf Moor on Tuesday.

But the Fourth Division leaders threatened to make it a glory night for the underdogs in a memorable and at times pulsating, cup-tie.

Burnley had a 100 per cent home record, and had scored 14 goals in five games. And the locals were dreaming of a return to the Halcyon days when Burnley were a real power in soccer.

With a 1-1 draw at Kenilworth Road to encourage them, more than 14,000 turned out to try to roar their team to success. And Burnley's players responded with an all-action whirlwind of attacking.

But as their manager Brian Miller had feared, they tried a little too hard. They got frantic, carried along on waves of terrace hysteria and encouragement, without finding a little coolness and patience that might have turned apparent domination into goals.

And if the Town's crowd-silencer, Ricky Hill's 53rd minute goal, was a little messy, their overall team performance in face of adversity finally deserved to earn the place in today's third round draw.

But it was heart-stopping stuff for the first 45 minutes as the Town were on the receiving end of a blood and thunder pounding.

And the battle was all the more admirable in view of injuries to Rob Johnson and Steve Foster. Johnson twisted his ankle in the fifth minute in a tackle with Paul Comstive, and was off for five minutes having treatment.

He returned to try to play through it for a further 14 minutes before giving away to Tim Breacker, whose first appearance of the season deserved to be a winning one.

In addition Foster suffered two early blows, pulling a thigh muscle in stretching for a tackle, and receiving

Brian Swain reports on Tuesday's Littlewoods Cup tie at Turf Moor

a shing of stud that later needed five stitches.

"Everyone played well, but he was magnificent," said the manager. "He didn't let us know how bad it was until later.

"Having sent on one sub for Johnson, I was a bit frightened of putting on another in case Foster couldn't get through. I thought he would have to come off. But he refused, and with 20 minutes to go he shouted across to tell me he was going to be all right.

"David Oldfield had run his heart out, and because of Foster's professionalism I was able to send on Ian Allinson for the late stages."

At half-time, the only bright prospect for the Town was that they had come through a gruelling examination without breaking, and that Burnley might just have shot their bolt.

They pounded away with a mixture of long balls into the area around the edge of the penalty area, and occasional wing runs by Paul Atkinson.

And while some of us worry about Mr Harford's mid-field selections, and the lack of a ball-winner in the Darren McDonough or Peter Nicholas mould, Danny Wilson was a revelation with his determined aid to the overworked defence.

Hill, expected to do his most vital work in attack, was also helping to man the pumps as the floods of Burnley attacks threatened to wash away the Town's interest in the competition.

"Win our cup? Takes more than luck" was the poster Town fans displayed, and so it proved.

The Town were forced to battle defensively, but did it so well that Burnley were never let in to within ten or 15 yards of Les Sealey, who is currently in his most consistent form since he came to Kenilworth Road.

out to be the last forlorn hope of the underdogs. "I knew the hardest part would be our home game," said the Burnley manager ruefully.

"We should have got a goal or two for the first-half pressure, but Luton were well organised and disciplined."

And eight minutes after the break the difference between controlled quality and uncontrolled enthusiasm brought the winner.

Hill led a Town break out of defence, with Burnley stretched. His pass sent Black scampering down the wing on another run which should have convinced watching Irish manager Billy Bingham that the youngster is worth a place in his team in Hungary next week.

Black was coolness personified as he weighed up the situation: he held the ball long enough for support to arrive, and picked out Wilson with a pass right to his feet.

Wilson's shot caught a deflection which took it round the post. Steve Williams dropped the corner into the desired spot, a yard or two from the near post. Steve Gardner shoved Harford out of the way to stop him making contact, and that left Hill with a close-range half-chance. He knocked the ball at the target, Peter Daniel got a despairing touch, and the goal eventually seemed to be scored at slow motion.

GETTING ON TOP

It didn't quite shut up the Burnley fans, but it changed the pattern of the game. Suddenly you knew that the Town were more than capable of holding on to the lead, and probably extending it.

Twice they came close to making the result more conclusive. Another break by action man Wilson found Mal Donaghy charging through on his own. He got clear, but shot straight, and it was saved.

But the keeper was nowhere when John Dreyer, who also had a magnificent match, broke down the left and crossed. Harford beat Chris Pearce in the air but the goal-bound header was cleared by Gardner.

Black almost found a way through with a 25-yard free kick, aided by Williams's dummy over the deadball, but Pearce made a scrambling save.

And the last defiant action by Burnley came with 22 minutes to go. George Oghani fouled Dreyer 30 yards from goal and set off on a mazy run. The ref blew for the foul. Oghani carried on and "scored".

The crowd went wild with delight, then with anger, when they realised that it was no goal. They were kidding themselves, of course.

Burnley had given everything, and were by no means disgraced. Their manager accepted that calm, professional skill had earned its reward. And Mr Harford summed it up correctly: "It wasn't just a result to give pleasure — it was the performance as well. We knew Burnley would come at us, and I admit that at times in the first half they had more possession than I would have liked.

"But I felt they were not creating real danger and I always fancied us to do the job at the other end.

"And don't forget that we had some pressure on us, because we knew we had to score to have any chance of going through.

"But perhaps on the night Burnley had more pressure on them. You could feel the crowd willing them to win, and that helped to make it a good cup-tie."

Match details

BURNLEY 0 LUTON TOWN 1

(Half-time: 0-0) 88/89

AGGREGATE: 1-2 (AFC)

TOWN: Sealey; R. Johnson (Breacker, 24 mins), Foster, Donaghy, Dreyer; Williams, Wilson, Black; Hill, Oldfield (Allinson, 74 mins), Harford.

BURNLEY: Pearce; Daniel, Zelem, Gardner, Farrell; Britton, Rowell, Comstive, Atkinson; O'Connell, Oghani. Subs: Taylor and McGrory, not used.

THE GOAL: Ricky Hill, 53rd minute, close range stab from near post corner by Steve Williams.

OTHER STRIKES: Town six saved and four wide; Burnley two saved and seven wide. Corners: 4-3 to Burnley.

ATTENDANCE: 14,021, Turf Moor's highest in two years.

REFEREE: Phil Wright, Northwich: over-zealous, with bookings for Foster, Wilson and Rowell all unnecessary.

ENTERTAINMENT: A rip-roaring cup-tie in the first half, when the Fourth Division leaders threw in everything against a Town defence that kept them at long range. Then a contest between controlled disciplined teamwork and Burnley huff and puff after the goal.

TOTAL DEDICATION

He dealt with the crosses that came near him, and the rest of the team dealt with everything else. It was total dedication, with Mick Harford doing his share at the back as well.

Atkinson cut inside on one run to carve out a chance, but wasted it by firing wide, and while Burnley hustled and harried, it was the Town who created the clearer chances.

Kingsley Black, like the rest prepared to slog it out at both ends of the field, helped to create the best in the first 45 minutes.

Wilson led a break from defence, and set the little winger away down the left. He wriggled past an attempted marker, and pulled back a careful low cross to Oldfield.

The incessant roar of Burnley voices was hushed for a moment as Oldfield took careful aim, with only a goalkeeper between him and a goal that might have been the winner. But he side-footed wide.

Referee Phil Wright upset both sides with some petty and officious actions, including bookings for Foster, Wilson and Gary Rowell of Burnley for offences that looked devoid of any spite.

But with 14,000 partisans pleading for a penalty when they thought Breacker had pushed Brendan O'Connell, Mr Wright was man enough to wave play on. It turned