

THE FANS' VERDICT: 'RUBBISH'!

EVEN MANAGER RAY HARFORD had no complaints about the cry from the travelling fans as Luton Town slumped to a listless defeat at Selhurst Park.

As Charlton, fighting their annual battle against relegation, helped themselves to some of the easiest points they can ever hope to receive, the Town fans chanted: "What a load of rubbish."

They were right. With the exception of Danny Wilson everyone had an off day, with a performance too poor to be explained by the absence of suspended Mick Harford.

You couldn't even put it down to inexperience, because senior men were among the flops. And perhaps it was a day to regret that Mal Donaghy was not still around to patch up the holes.

Charlton effectively won the points with three goals in the first 33 minutes, on a day when their defence was able to spend more time attacking than protecting their goal.

Bob Bolder had to make only one save in the whole 90 minutes, from sub Tim Breacker, when the game was nearly an hour old.

At the other end Les Sealey let in three and stopped two more, from Steve MacKenzie and Paul Williams, that might easily have been goals.

The best Town effort came from one of their few flowing moves, while they were one down but still very much in the game.

Richard Harvey, Kingsley Black and David Preece worked the ball neatly down the left flank, with Preece's ball being met by Wilson in the inside left slot.

As Bolder advanced Wilson's first-time lob with the outside of his right boot left the goalkeeper stranded.

It looked like being a brilliant equaliser until the ball bounced painfully wide of the far post. Straight from the clearance Charlton got their second, and the Town never looked an effective team after that.

Charlton's victory was not a case of a team of battlers scrapping their way to the points. They did it with neat football, passing which was far superior to the Town's, and an obvious hunger to keep their survival hopes alive.

A BIT OF A DODDLE

In the second half it became so much of a doddle that Charlton were able to relax and not worry too much about where their moves were taking them.

They were allowed to stroll about, apparently confident that they no longer needed to hit top gear to keep ahead.

It would be too simple to look at individual Town performances which were below par. But defeats, like victories, are down to teams as a whole, and everyone has to accept responsibility as the goals against column rose to ten in three London games since the trip to Millwall a week previously.

My view was that Charlton had two vital areas of dominance. In midfield Andy Peake controlled almost everything, while Garth Crooks, Paul Williams and winger Robert Lee benefited from the ammunition he supplied.

Williams and Crooks, down the middle, look lightweight attackers. But they were quick and nimble, and when Charlton kept it on the deck they were always a threat.

The amount of time and space they were given was worrying, while the Town were never able to achieve the same luxury at the other end.

Kingsley Black played in a withdrawn role on the left, with David Oldfield and Roy Wegerle unable to fashion any kind of attacking combination to worry Charlton.

The Town got nowhere with the long ball and perhaps we were lucky that it was only Charlton providing the

opposition. I dread to think of what an Arsenal or Liverpool might have done against the same Town performance.

Charlton had served notice in the first ten minutes of their ability to convert corners. They won three on the left, with the Town scrambling to clear the first two. Wilson and Harvey managed to get the second away after a near post flick-on enabled Williams to head wide of Sealey's left hand.

Four minutes after the escape a carbon-copy set piece play gave Charlton the lead. Peake took the corner from the left, defender Peter Shirliff back-headed on at the near post, Williams got in another header to nudge the ball on further, and left back Paul Mortimer popped up to score with the third header, from close range.

The Town replied with Steve Foster heading wide from a free kick by Preece, followed by Wilson's lobbed near-miss.

But from the goal kick Charlton got their second and the Town wilted away. Foster was trying to get the ball away from a position about ten yards outside his penalty area. Williams won the ball, lobbed it forward, and as Marvin Johnson slipped Crooks raced through to get a yard ahead and lob the stranded Sealey.

Another reprisal attempt by the Town ended with Oldfield shooting into the side netting from Black's left-wing cross, but Charlton's third goal settled matters in the 33rd minute.

Peake started it with a diagonal pass inside Richard Harvey towards the corner flag. Right back John Humphrey overlapped and crossed.

TIME TO SET HIMSELF

Crooks had time to set himself for the shot that might have scored, but Foster blocked it. The rebound went to Crooks again, about ten yards from goal, and this time he squared a short pass to his right and Williams slammed a low drive into the net.

Two saves by Sealey prevented further humiliation, and Crooks shot wide when Harvey miskicked in the attempt to prevent a pass going past his right boot.

Harvey, under pressure at Millwall and Selhurst Park against wingers prepared to run at him, was subbed ten minutes after the break.

Breacker went to right back and Rob Johnson switched to the left, to quieten Lee. It was, however, a belated closing of the stable door.

Iain Dowie went on for his First Division debut as replacement for Oldfield with 22 minutes to play, and the Town's hopes already shattered.

But at least there was a little threat, if no achievement, firstly with Breacker's shot from Roy Wegerle's lay-back. The South African also did well to send Dowie on a run down the right, but the cross was pulled back a yard too far as Wegerle and Black got into threatening positions.

But the last notable action was Sealey's tip-over save from Williams as Charlton enjoyed their first league win in ten attempts.

My only consolation was that when the Town were last hammered in a league game, 4-0 at Wimbledon, they bounced back rapidly with the home win over Southampton. Last night's return by the Saints in the Littlewoods Cup could hardly have been better timed for a team needing to regain its professional pride.

Match details

CHARLTON 3 LUTON 0

88/89

HALF-TIME: 3-0

CHARLTON: Bolder; Humphrey, Shirliff, Pates, Mortimer; MacKenzie, Peake, Gritt (Minto 75 mins); Lee, Crooks (Leaburn 75 mins), Williams.

TOWN: Sealey; Rob Johnson, Foster, Marvin Johnson, Harvey (Breacker, 54 mins); Wilson, Hill, Preece, Black; Wegerle, Oldfield (Dowie 68 mins).

THE GOALS: Paul Mortimer header from flicked-on corner, 12th minute; Garth Crooks ten-yard lob from over-the-top ball, 22nd minute; Paul Williams, low drive set up by Crooks, 33rd minute.

OTHER STRIKES: Town one saved — a late drive by sub defender Tim Breacker — and five wide; Charlton three saved and four wide. Corners: 8-1 to Charlton.

ATTENDANCE: 5,212, Charlton's lowest league gate of the season so far.

REFEREE: Peter Jones, Loughborough, handled an easy game well except for being a little hasty with a yellow card for Danny Wilson for not retreating ten yards at a free kick. Wilson stayed there after the booking, and got away with a telling-off the second time.

ENTERTAINMENT: Provided entirely by Charlton. The Town were dreadful and deserved the "what a load of rubbish" chants from their fans.