

Two-goal reply a home stunner

AFTER PUTTING on a brave face in the Pressroom after Saturday's match, manager Jim Ryan slumped like a very sick man in his office.

He was close to being physically ill with the realisation that his team had thrown away a two-goal home lead, and probably given themselves too much to do in the last four games to halt the plunge to relegation.

The difference in the two halves was inexplicable. From being smooth and controlled, and deserving to be ahead, the Town disintegrated.

Iain Dowie had become the second Town man this season to score twice in a league game, powering home a near post header in the second minute from Jason Rees's cross, and cashing in on an open goal chance made by Tim Breacker's run and low centre four minutes before the break.

Everton's Colin Harvey admitted that the Town deserved that lead, which had been ably defended by two superb saves by Alec Chamberlain, one from Graeme Sharp's header and the other in a one-to-one confrontation with Tony Cottee.

The visitors had hardly expected an easy time — they have never won on a pitch they dislike and they went into the game with five regulars out through injuries, including Kevin Ratcliffe, Norman Whiteside and Mike Newell.

The half-time chat in the happy Town dressing room was to the effect that the game was as good as won if a good professional job was done to hold it for the second 45 minutes.

But Harvey was telling his men that Everton could at the very least wipe out the deficit, and very probably win. "Score once and they will panic in their situation," he said.

And the Town manager could hardly believe it as the forecast came true.

His men played as though they were chasing the game, not Everton.

Neville Southall was lucky to prevent it going to 3-0 when his legs kept out

LUTON	2
EVERTON	2

Kingsley Black's header from Danny Wilson's cross.

Everything changed in the 66th minute when Cottee and Stuart McCall swapped passes in midfield. McCall got down the right, sent in a low cross past Chamberlain, and Cottee expertly converted with his right foot.

Eleven minutes later Darron McDonough gave away a pointless corner with a wide back pass, and Sharp headed in Beagrie's kick.

And the first-half winners were close to being second-half losers because Everton ran the game after the equaliser.

Sharp drove over the bar when he should have scored, brought a fine save from Chamberlain with another shot, and then created an opportunity for Cottee which was wasted through a miskick.

The Match Details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Breacker, Dreyer, McDonough, James; Wilson, Kennedy (Beaumont, 88 mins), Preece; Rees (Cooke 88 mins), Dowie, Black.

EVERTON: Southall; Atteveld, Watson, McDonald, Ebbrell; Nevin, McCall, Sheedy, Beagrie; Cottee, Sharp. Subs: Wright and Powell, not used.

THE GOALS: Iain Dowie twice for the Town, header from Jason Rees cross in the second minute and tap-in from Tim Breacker's pass, 41st minute. Tony Cottee shot for Everton, 66th minute and Graeme Sharp header, 77th minute.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved and seven wide; Everton five saved and four wide. Corners: 8-3 to Everton.

REFEREE: Vic Callow, Solihull: not too popular with Town fans and players, but was not the only man on the field to fail to hit 100 per cent perfection.

ATTENDANCE: 9,538, an increase of 500 on Everton's visit last season.

ENTERTAINMENT: A neutral Pressman told me it was one of the best games he has seen this season. It would have been for Town fans too if it had finished after the first 45 minutes.