

All square for the second leg at St. Andrew's

**LUTON TOWN 2
BIRMINGHAM 2**

The Rumbelows Cup

BOTH managers agreed that the Rumbelows Cup-tie is nicely poised when it resumes at St. Andrews's on Tuesday.

The first leg at Kenilworth Road showed that either side is capable of going through to the third round.

Terry Cooper, the Blues manager, thought the Town had up to 80 per cent of the play, and was well pleased at the way his Third Division side handled their task.

Two recoveries

Town boss David Pleat had the satisfaction of seeing his men fight back twice after defensive mistakes gave the Blues the encouragement they sought.

Birmingham looked quick in attack, with Ian Rogerson and Nigel Gleghorn dangerous on the flanks. The running of Simon Sturridge was also a threat to a Town defence that had to be reshuffled because Trevor Peake was out through injury.

David Beaumont had a very good game as his deputy, but once again isolated defensive errors proved to be costly.

Birmingham's other major asset was a crowd — they were the first visiting club this season to all but fill the 2,000 seats at the Oak Road end, and their non-stop backing put the home crowd to shame.

Mick Harford was out with a groin strain, and unable to play against one of his former clubs, but for compensation there was a welcome return by Philip Gray, with a nice mixture of mobility, touch and toughness.

He might have been the match-winner, because he suffered more than most from the smart work of goalkeeper Martin Thomas when the Town had periods of ascendancy against a side that looked much better than Third Division.

Early goal

Birmingham had the boost of an early goal. Gleghorn fired over a deep cross, and Rogerson, on the right, was left on his own to steer a header into the net.

The Blues defence lived dangerously after that, but the deserved equaliser arrived in the 48th minute. Graham Rodger, skipper in the absence of Peake, sent the excellent Matthew Jackson overlapping down the right wing, and his quick hard cross was the perfect invitation for Gray to mark his return with his third goal in six starts.

The Town gained confidence from that, but after surviving a lot of pressure Birmingham came back with a goal out of the blue. This time Rogerson provided it, getting round John Dreyer and delivering a good cross, and Gleghorn produced the scoring header.

To their credit the Town came back again, and Thomas was heroic to prevent the tie being just about settled at the first bite.

The Blues held out until seven minutes from time, when Dreyer moved up and crossed for Gray to add a flick-on with his head to confuse the Birmingham defence. Kurt Nogan, who had gone on as sub for Brian Stein, headed his first goal of the season to set up a fascinating second leg.

Match details

TOWN: Chamberlain; Jackson, Beaumont, Rodger, Dreyer; Telfer, Thompson, Pembridge, Preece; Stein (Nogan 72 mins), Gray (Salton 83).

BIRMINGHAM: Thomas; Clarkeson, Hicks, Marden, Matthewson; Rogerson, Frain, Peer, Gleghorn; Donowa, Sturridge. Subs: Atkins, Okenla, not used.

THE GOALS: Ian Rogerson for Birmingham, 3 mins; Philip Gray for the Town, 48 mins; Nigel Gleghorn for Birmingham 59 mins; Kurt Nogan for the Town, 83 mins.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town seven saved and five wide; Birmingham three saved and three wide. Corners: 5-2 to the Town.

BOOKED: Donowa, for dissent, Rogerson and Sturridge, encroaching at free kicks, Jackson for a foul on Sturridge.

REF: Roger Pawley, Cambridge. Awfully finicky.

ATTENDANCE: 6,315 including 2,000 from Birmingham who often shouted the Town following.

ENTERTAINMENT: Patchy at times, with the Town needing to stick at their football to get their fair return, and Birmingham proving to be hard-working and determined.