

Two-goal recovery is in vain

Coca-Cola Cup: Plymouth 3 Luton Town 2 (Agg 5-4)

Match details

ALTHOUGH they are out of the Coca-Cola Cup, beaten by a team from a division below them, the Town regained a lot of pride in a tremendous last half-hour at Home Park.

A revival sparked by the arrival of **Scott Oakes** as sub as an extra attacker pulled the deficit back to a single goal, and had Plymouth fans pleading for the final whistle long before the end.

Damage done

But too much damage had already been done at the other end, with two goals conceded in the first leg at Luton and three more at Home Park in the first 54 minutes.

At three down, it was the old story: the Town, the better footballing side, had no punch to complete the good work.

Plymouth made fewer chances but were more potent where it mattered.

They snatched a third-minute lead through **Kevin Nugent**, went two up five minutes after the break through **Gary Poole**, and seemed to be home and dry when **David Regis** got the third four minutes later.

The Town had been punished for pushing men upfield and being caught

for pace at the back on the counter-attacks.

Two gambles were made by manager **David Pleat**: skipper **Trevor Peake** was brought back early after his hamstringing injury, and that was a qualified success. He brought the leadership the team needed, but made a hash of a clearance to make the third goal a gift for Regis.

And he later limped out of the game with a muscle strain, which ruled him out of Saturday's fixture at Oakwell, where he was sorely missed.

Variety and pace

More dramatic was the result of the second gamble, when Oakes went on to add variety and speed to the attack in place of midfielder **Julian James**.

With his first significant touch Oakes fired in a 25-yarder which **Peter Shilton** could not hold and **Steve Claridge** pounced on the rebound.

And Plymouth were rocked when another Oakes piledriver was neatly deflected past Shilton by **David Preece** to set up a grandstand finish.

Ironically, Plymouth created the

clearer chances after that, with sub **Paul Adcock** spurning one and Poole hitting the bar from another.

The Town manager praised his men for the quality of their fightback after being three down. Before that, he said, they had dominated without being penetrative.

He admired "flashes of imaginative football" which suggested a young team is on the right lines, and added: "Overall we were better than Plymouth. But better doesn't mean the same as effective."

Manager's error

Plymouth boss Shilton admitted he had boobed for the goal by Claridge. "I made a horlicks of it and gave them a goal to let them back into it," he said.

"But I was delighted with our team performance. We knew we would have to work very hard off the ball to close them down, pressurise them and make life difficult for them, and we did that very well."

LUTON TOWN: Petterson; Linton, Salton, Peake (Dreyer 86 mins), Johnson; Rees, Kamara, James (Oakes 60 mins), Preece; Claridge, Grav.

PLYMOUTH: Shilton; Edworthy, Morrison, Hill, Spearing; Skinner, Joyce, Garner, Poole; Nugent (Adcock 69), Regis. Other sub: Barlow.

GOALS: Kevin Nugent, 3 mins, Gary Poole 50 and Dave Regis, 54, for Plymouth; Steve Claridge for the Town, 61 mins, after Peter Shilton found a drive by Scott Oakes too hot to hold; David Preece for the Town, 68 mins, deflection from a drive by Oakes.

OTHER ATTEMPTS: Town nine saved and six wide; Plymouth five saved, five wide and one hit the bar. Corners: 6-2 to the Town.

REFEREE: Martin Bodenham, Looe. Did well but the Town thought his linesman let him down by not giving offside in the build-up to Plymouth's second goal.

BOOKED: No-one.

ATTENDANCE: 8,946, Plymouth's best of the season so far, with nearly 200 from Luton doing their best to compete in the cheering match.

ENTERTAINMENT: Awful for the first hour as Plymouth went into a 3-0 lead, but tremendous as Scott Oakes inspired a Town-fightback which so nearly saved the day.