

A RED card for **Garry Waddock**, and a potentially serious injury to **Marvin Johnson**, took some of the shine off the pleasure that rolled around Kenilworth Road on Tuesday night as a long run of failure in the League Cup came to an end.

There were no complaints from manager **Lennie Lawrence** about the double-yellow card dismissal of Waddock, for encroaching at a free kick in the 82nd minute, and then mistiming a tackle on Lee Martin four minutes later.

He said referees no longer had any discretion, and had to administer the letter of the law. But Paul Taylor failed to do that earlier, when Billy Clark upended **Kim Grant**, who had got goalside of him. Mr Taylor settled for a caution and a penalty, and **Tony Thorpe** took his chance to net his second goal of the season.

Bontcho Guentchev, who missed a penalty against Burnley on Saturday, watched from the subs' bench.

Lawrence was well pleased with the performance and the result. So were the fans in the smallest crowd since the last war - the Town had lost 13 times in the past six years in failing to get beyond the first hurdle in this competition.

The team responded to the disappointment of the opening day defeat with a more determined showing.

Steve Davis returned after injury, but **Darren Patterson** could be back for Saturday's visit to Brentford as a ready-made replacement for Johnson.

His injury was sustained when **Steve Parmenter** fouled him to collect the Rovers' fourth booking of the night.

They were a tough side, playing quick direct soccer, and might have had a goal or two themselves.

Waddock played a big part in holding his old club in midfield, and although he will be suspended for the second leg in a fortnight's time, Lawrence said: "If we can't do it down there with a three-goal lead we won't deserve to progress."

Ian Feuer made an important early save, to tip a drive by **Ian Holloway** onto the bar, and Rovers appealed in vain for a penalty when **Mitchell Thomas** seemed to use a hand from the resulting corner.

Ceri Hughes returned to play well in three different roles during the game, and seems set to make his point about being good enough to play at a higher level, whatever **Dave Bassett** might think.

Davis was back to his old stumbling block best, and also got up to support the attack, hitting a post from a corner by the industrious **Graham Alexander**.

As a team the Town were more composed than Rovers, but crucially the luck that went against them in the Burnley match evened out on Tuesday night.

The penalty in the closing seconds of the first half settled nerves on and off the pitch, and the Town wrapped up the tie with two goals in a minute. The first was pure farce, with goalkeeper **Andy Collett** and Clark colliding with each other to leave Grant free to put the ball into an empty net after Davis's header bounced on the edge of the area.

But the third goal was sheer class: Grant sent Thorpe down the right wing, and the fierce cross was met by **David Oldfield**, diving horizontally to power in a header that would have beaten better keepers than Collett.

Rovers played their part in a good game by trying to attack, and twice **Julian James** cleared off the line when corners caused some difficulty. And Feuer made saves from **Andy Tillson** and **Parmenter** to leave the Town sitting pretty for the second leg. It was no less than they deserved.