

TOWN FOUND GOALS SCARCE AGAIN

BRILLIANT APPROACH WORK FADED OUT

Had Chance To Gain Both Points From Rotherham

By Chiltern

Even though two-thirds of the season has gone, it would be a brave man who dare to choose the two teams most likely to win the coveted prize of First Division football.

Last Saturday's results only served to group the contenders closer together, with the lead changing after Leicester City, apparently slipping badly, had suffered their third consecutive League defeat—an interesting turn of events for the Town in view of the fact that the City are their next opponents in the Second Division.

WHILE the loss of a home point by the Town to Rotherham was an acute disappointment and could prove to be a serious matter eventually, it was not vitally affected their position at the moment, for they are all well placed for a consistent win.

From their point of view, their hopes may hinge considerably on the matches that face them in February, when three out of four are due to be played on the grounds of opponents.

Everybody would be feeling a good deal happier were the forwards suddenly to find their shooting boots, which they seem to have mislaid during these last few weeks.

Readier Acceptance Of Chances Needed

FOUR goals in the last five matches does not make satisfying reading, even allowing for the strength of the Blackpool defence which they have opposed three of them, and a readier and more accurate acceptance of spring opportunities would have put them high and dry against Rotherham long before the interval.

While there was some talk afterwards about staleness and weariness following the long-drawn-out Cup-tie, I do not think that this had much to do with the Town's partial failure in this match, because much of the football they played in the first half was as good as anything they have produced at Kenilworth-road for a long time.

Lined Smoothly Until Came To Finishing

DURING the first part of the game, the Town team worked like a well-oiled machine, finding the other with precision and baffling the Rotherham defence in midfield.

Where things went wrong, however, was in the penalty area, where all their accuracy seemed to desert them, and some reasonably simple chances went astray during the first half an hour. They reached that stage a goal had, obtained by Turner after minutes when he turned a low centre by Davies after Burton and Moore had had an earlier hand in a fluent move.

Everything Pointed To A Good Win

THERE were other moves of similar calibre that promised spring goals but somehow or other never did, and both Turner and Moore could have helped the Town to build up during this period a lead which would have put them completely out of danger.

In fact, everything seemed to be building up to a convincing Town victory, despite the remissness of the forwards in front of goal, and could still have happened had it been for the encouragement Rotherham received from a goal which came six minutes before the interval.

Opportunist Effort By Burke

THERE was little of the crispness that marked the beginnings of the Town's success as the ball might have been kicked a couple of times before the threat really developed. It was allowed Wilson to get the ball across when he might well have cleared, and Owen was unable to tackle when it came to the middle.

He went over to the right where he gained control, and he kicked the ball over the head of the Rotherham who had sought to clear, as Owen shaped to clear, he hurled himself at the ball

Rotherham Defence Earned Much Credit

IT was in the minutes after this that the Town came nearest to losing the grip they had for nearly all the match, and Rotherham's forwards, showing a much greater readiness to have a crack at goal than those of the Town, caused no little anxiety.

However the pattern changed again in the second half, with the Town doing nearly all the pressing, and, persistent though they were, they could not break down a Rotherham defence which came out of this match with a great credit.

Their covering was excellent but they were helped to a considerable extent by the fact that the Town kept the ball too close.

Bad Luck As Well As Poor Finishing

TRUE, there were occasions when the Town could reckon themselves most unlucky, as when Cummins, from a very acute angle, screwed the ball in, only to see it strike the bar and rebound to safety just out of Turner's reach.

Then there was another effort by Cummins that Quirney reached at the last split second, and one from Turner that sent the ball inches wide of the far post.

So, there was bad luck to weigh against bad finishing, but the fact remains that the line, good though it looks in approach, is not deadly enough inside the penalty area.

Over-Eagerness Comes From Goals Scarcity

MAYBE, over-eagerness comes into it, as it will when goals are scarce, and there were certainly signs of lack of confidence about much of the shooting.

There were occasions when it looked as if Cummins would come along with another valuable goal and he certainly deserved to, for this was one of his best displays on the home ground.

He got through a tremendous amount of work and he was not one who suffered from a shortage of confidence.

Always he was in the thick of the fight, continually showing the ability to beat an opponent cleverly, and it was probably his keenness that led him to try a little too much now and again, but he could have brought Mitchell more into the game.

Davies Had A Good First Half

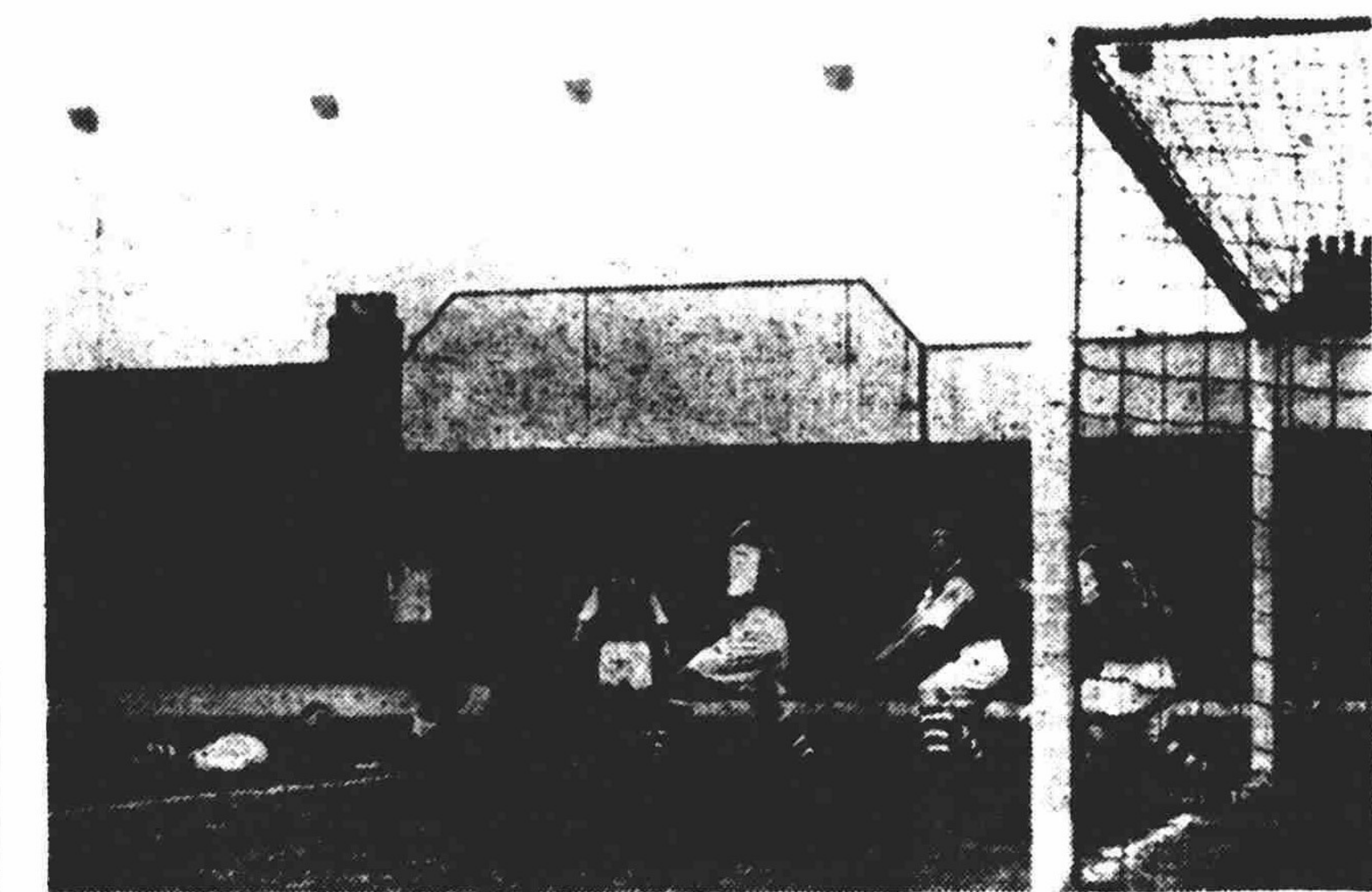
THE other forwards had their moments in approach and Davies was in splendid form right through the first half when he and Turner formed a well-balanced wing.

Later, Davies fell into the habit of flicking the ball first-time when more direct methods would have brought better results, but he was always fighting and worrying and he showed no signs of trouble in his ankle.

Rotherham obviously decided that Turner was the man from whom they could expect most threat at close quarters and Williams scarcely left his side during the second half.

Moore's Shooting Was Off The Mark

TO a large extent this put Turner out of the game, which was not one of his best and he missed chances from the puzzle of the centre-forward angle from which he usually makes no mistake.



Rotherham on the defensive in the battle of promotion-hunters at Kenilworth-road on Saturday. With goalkeeper Quirney out of goal, a header from Bernard Moore rises over the bar.—R6518J

position remains because Moore's finishing is letting him down.

During the first half he fitted into the scheme of things well, by keeping the ball on the move, but he was badly off the mark with his shooting.

Later, obviously on instructions, he did not wander to the wings so much and then became very much in the clutches of that stalwart centre-half Noble.

Played Splendidly In Approach

MITCHELL is another who seems to have forgotten the way to goal and he is not bringing to a successful conclusion much work that looks promising enough in its early stages.

Yet the line as a whole showed us unmistakably that it can play as good football as that of any team in the Second Division—but the fact that goals count in the end is something that must not be lost sight of, admirable though much of their work is.

There is such a thing as doing too much pressing and something of the sort happened to the Town in the second half when the Rotherham defence always seemed to have covered up.

Wing-Halves Often Had Attacking Role

BOTH wing-halves were able to turn much of their attention to an attacking role with Watkins showing the way to the forwards at times by the quality of his marksmanship.

Morton, too, often came through strongly, but, on this occasion, showed an inclination to try to beat one opponent too many.

However, both had a real grip on the situation and were a major part of the season why Rotherham's forwards were dangerous only in spasms.

Only for that few minutes before the interval did Grainger have a chance to show why he is one of the most coveted wingers

FOR THE RECORDS

LUTON TOWN 1
Turner

ROTHERHAM UTD. ... 1
Burke

LUTON TOWN: Stretton;
Jones, Aherne; Morton,
Owen, Watkins; Davies,
Turner, Moore, Cummins,
Mitchell.

ROTHERHAM UNITED:
Quirney; Selkirk, Johnson;
Marshall, Noble, Williams
(D); Grainger, Henderson,
Burke, Churms, Wilson.

Referee: G. Pankhurst,
Warwick. Attendance:
17,300.

in football, and for the rest of the time he was well held by Aherne.

Aherne Kept Close Watch On Grainger

IN Grainger, Aherne could scarcely have found a winger with a more contrasting style than the one he has been opposing recently, but he adopted the right tactics by marking him closely, and came through with full marks.

With more support, the dashing, bustling Burke might have been a considerable danger, but in his quick breaks he found Owen a rare stumbling block and there were few occasions when he was not quickly tackled by the centre-half.

Again, the Town defence as a whole showed the qualities that has served them so well in Cup-ties.

Defence Has A Fine Recent Record

THERE was close marking, excellent covering and, once more, there was Stretton to retrieve the situation when all else seemed lost with at least three saves that were right out of the top drawer.

While the forwards have scored only four goals in five matches,

the defence has conceded only a similar number, and a lot of the credit for this record goes to Stretton.

Hampered by injury, Jones was rather below par. He aggravated his knee ligament trouble just before half-time and, immediately after the match, he was ruled out of the running for yesterday's match at Wolverhampton, and it may be a fortnight before he is fit again.

Forward Failings By Reserves, Too

FORTUNATELY for the Town, they have in reserve the capable, experienced Seamus Dunne, who has already made 22 League appearances this season, but, at the same time, the injury to Jones is a bad blow since it means a depletion of the reserve strength.

Similar failings were shown by the second string forwards when they played a 1-1 draw with Fulham at Craven Cottage on Saturday.

According to reports, they should have come away with both points to strengthen their challenge to West Ham and Tottenham, who had to be content with a point apiece from their meeting at White Hart-lane.

Downie Deserved To Be A Scorer

ONLY goal for the Reserves was an "own goal" affair by Lowe and there was a lack of final thrust in attack where only Downie revealed real power in his finishing and was unlucky not to get among the goals.

Brilliant saves by a young goalkeeper, Nicholls, who received an ovation at the end prevented him from doing so. John Groves, introduced at inside-right, tended to keep the ball too close which was a general fault in attack.

There was soundness in defence and young McGuffie again showed real promise.