

TOO-CLOSE ATTACK HAD NO FINISH

Gift Goal Beat Town, But They Had Their Chances

By Chiltern

LUTON TOWN 0 STOKE CITY 1

If ever there were a match that the Town needed to win, this was it, but they threw away the opportunity of picking up the two points vital to them in their promotion bid by the use of the wrong tactics on the muddy Kenilworth-road pitch and by the weakness of their finishing.

This lack of goals, which has now reached epidemic proportions, has caused the Town to lose ground badly in the promotion race and they are not making the most of opportunities that come their way.

Despite the fact that they consistently kept the ball too close, chances did occur, to be wasted by poor shooting, or by the fact that no shot came at all.

Perhaps it is a direct product of the goal famine, but the Town forwards seldom showed the inclination to have a go from the region of 20 yards, as Stoke did. Rather, they tried to reach closer range, maybe with the underlying idea of trying to make certain that the barren spell should come to an end.

With the ball so greasy and the going treacherous, shots from almost any range could be troublesome to goalkeepers, and Streten discovered that even the most innocent looking sort of pass held hidden danger.

This occurred in the 25th minute, when, having shouted to the men in front of him to allow a through pass to go to him, he found the ball slipping out of his grasp and, before he could recover MALKIN, who had been lurking close by, had the ball in the back of the net.

GIFT GOAL MEANT TWO POINTS

A gift goal, it was, but it meant two points to Stoke, who earned them if only for their rugged determination, the way they suited their tactics to the conditions and the more adventurous spirit of their forwards.

Earlier, the Town had had a couple of good chances of taking the lead. First, MacEwan shot against the foot of the post and then Turner, sent through by Watkins blazed the ball high over when, had he kept it low, he would have given Robertson little chance.

Attempts by the Town to equalise were driven off, and then, suddenly, Stoke took complete charge of the game for a short spell and might very easily have increased their lead.

Martin rattled the Luton cross-bar, both Hutton and Bowyer were only inches wide, and Streten twice saved brilliantly from Hutton.

During this time Stoke pointed the way to the Town by moving the ball about quickly, a demonstration from which the Town did not benefit for they continued to keep the ball too close in the second half.

They had a lot of the play, but few worthwhile shots, though Turner was unlucky to see a shot headed away by Bourne with Robertson right out of position.

Meanwhile, Bowyer had seen a shot go over off the top of the bar, and Luton's most persistent efforts did not arrive until Morton was switched into the middle with MacEwan at outside-left, Mitchell outside-right and Davies right-half.

Many Town supporters considered that Morton had scored when Robertson mishandled a shot from him and the ball spun behind him, but the referee, after a glance at the linesman, ruled that the ball had not crossed the line.

So, the Stoke defence which had

done so much to earn this success, stood firm and there was great power in their half-back line in which Mountford and Thomson were outstanding.

It was no sort of a day for MacEwan to make his League bow before the home crowd, for, apart from the heavy going which was strange to him, he had to contend with lack of the right sort of support and the close shadowing of the experienced Thomson, who must be in line for a Scottish cap.

Result was that MacEwan had an unproductive afternoon and so did Cummins, largely because he held on to the ball too long, tried to do too much and was most inaccurate in his use of the ball.

Rarely did the Town forwards attempt the obvious and allow the ball to do the work as did Stoke, and Turner was another who tended to be caught in possession, but most of what shooting there was came from him.

With the inside trio just not clicking, main honours in attack went to the wingers, with Mitchell always lively and always searching for openings. Davies turned in another whole-hearted display and both deserved better support than that which came their way.

When goals are so scarce at the other end, it is heart-breaking work for the defence and leaves no margin for error on their part.

Apart from the short inspired spell the Stoke forwards had just before the interval, the Town defence was very much on top of the job and, in the second half, there was little danger of Stoke increasing their lead.

Owen returned to bar the way down the middle effectively and Morton and Watkins, both strong in the tackle and continually trying to use the ball, ploughed through the mud manfully and successfully.

Nor was there much amiss with the full-backs despite the nippiness of the visiting wingers and Dunne, in particular, was very successful.

So was Streten, apart from that tragic mistake that cost the vital goal and he made several fine saves both before and afterwards.

LUTON TOWN. — Streten: Dunne, Aherne; Morton, Owen, Watkins; Davies, Turner, MacEwan, Cummins, Mitchell.

STOKE CITY. — Robertson: Bourne, McCue; Mountford, Thomson, Sellars; Malkin, Bowyer, King, Martin, Hutton.

Referee.—A. Holland, Barasley. Attendance: 17,058.