

ROCK BOTTOM WAS REACHED BY TOWN

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

Gamble With Inexperience Was A Costly Failure

By CHILTERN

STOKE CITY 3, LUTON TOWN 0

ON the face of things, the result of this match at the Victoria Ground does not read too badly for the Town, but it has to be considered in the light of what actually happened and in terms of value for the future.

So far as the latter is concerned, it had exactly no value at all, except to give positive notice that, if this is a sample of the reserve strength available, then the future is a very glum affair, indeed.

Fortunately that is not the whole story because, as things turned out, the position for which replacements had to be found because of injuries to experienced stalwarts, probably could have been filled more adequately from existing resources.

However, what officials saw was sufficient to convince them that a hurried excursion into the transfer market in the hope of securing experienced recruits was a vital necessity.

There is no doubt that the Town reached rock bottom in this dull, tawdry affair and their form caused people from the north to wonder what had happened to the team that played some bright football, showed unbounded fighting spirit and gained a point at Liverpool only a few short weeks before.

Answer, of course, is contained in the absence of names such as Baynham, Morton, Pacey and Turner and the changes that had to follow, plus the fact that some of the more experienced men are out of form.

In the side were three players who could boast of only two previous League appearances between them and that inexperience proved to be too heavy a burden for the remainder to shoulder.

For a 16-years-old with only five reserve team games behind him, O'Hara did probably as much as could have been expected of him and his work was of a better standard than that of two other promoted youngsters, Collins and McCann.

Even so, the fault for two of the three goals could be placed at his door and he needs more time in which to develop his undoubted promise.

Hope that Collins might be the one to solve the centre-half problem was doomed to failure because he showed neither the judgment, nor the mobility to promise success. As for McCann, one or two deft touches apart, he looked completely out of his depth.

Nor was the switch of Tracey to inside-right one that is likely

to be repeated in League football and McBride made no sort of an impression.

With Imlach out of touch, too, only Bingham, of the Town forward line looked capable of posing serious danger and he did the best he could with no sort of service.

For Groves and Brown, there was a harassing, over-run sort of afternoon during which both came in for criticism for inaccuracy of distribution and a somewhat struggling Dunne and a tenacious Hawkes, did the best they could to effect the cover that was so often necessary.

Pointer to the final result came in the 10th minute when Stoke went ahead through BENTLEY, who gratefully accepted a rebound after O'Hara had gone down to, and failed to hold, a cross by Ratcliffe.

The second goal, a quarter of an hour later, provided almost the only worthwhile after the match topic. Most had no hesitation in crediting it to Wilshaw, but it was said that GROVES stabbed the ball into his own net in his attempt to clear.

Final seal on the Town's fate came 20 minutes from the end when WILSHAW tapped the ball in after O'Hara and Dunne had both erred.

STOKE CITY.—O'Neill; Ward, Allen; Skells, Andrew, Asprey; Bentley, Ratcliffe, King, Howitt, Wilshaw.

LUTON TOWN.—O'Hara; Dunne, Hawkes; Groves, Collins, Brown; Bingham, Tracey, McBride, McCann, Imlach.

Referee.—H. P. Mackney, Barnsley. Attendance: 9,395.

"Their defence was vulnerable to a Stoke attack which was never any great shakes, while their forward line, in which only right-winger Billy Bingham retained his place, was so woefully weak."—*"Empire News."*

"Luton, with eight changes, presented this game to Stoke City due to some amazing defensive lapses.

"Stoke were not impressive, but they snapped up the goal chances when they came their way."—*"Sunday Dispatch."*

"With so many square pegs in round holes—and some holes with nothing in them at all—Bartram's boys could not contain a side which, if not clever or classy, kept up a brisk prodding and probing.

"Town's attack tried valiantly to hit back but their own deficiencies, plus City's strong defence proved too much."—*"Sunday Express."*

"There was no excuse for this pathetic Luton performance. Stoke never rose above average, but this was enough to master a planless and dispirited side.

"Luton's defence was ripped apart by the most elementary moves in the Soccer text book, while the attack never clicked."—*"The People."*

"Luton made it all so easy for Stoke to keep their unbeaten home record. Their weakness in attack and unsteadiness in defence were an encouragement to City's hitherto goal-shy forwards."—*"News of the World."*

"Sixteen - years - old Michael O'Hara had the sort of introduction to League football that would have broken the nerve of a player twice his age.

"But the young Luton goalkeeper, although not entirely blameless over two of Stoke's goals, need not be too disheartened. He got no help from Luton's defence and was virtually an Aunt Sally for the Stoke forwards."—*"News Chronicle."*