

FRUSTRATING AND BORING AWAY FORM

Town Never In With A Chance Of Winning

By CHILTERN

BRISTOL ROVERS 4, LUTON TOWN 1

CONSTANT repetition produces incalculable boredom and that is what the Town's away form this season has become, apart from bringing a feeling of frustration among the faithful who rarely miss an away match, whatever the distance.

Unless I am much mistaken, their ranks were distinctly thinner than usual at Eastville on Saturday, a wise decision as it turned out because they spared themselves the spectacle of another milk and water type of display by the Town who were soundly beaten.

Of their last 11 away games, the Town have lost ten and this was their fifth failure in a row, and against a team that has been feeling acute anxiety about its League position.

It was not the fact of defeat that caused the depression among the Town officials afterwards, but the manner in which it was suffered.

Never, at any stage, were the Town in this match with a chance of winning and they accomplished the rare and unwanted distinction of going right through the first half without having a shot at goal.

There just was not the slightest semblance of punch in a Town attack in which Turner and Ashworth roamed and foraged ceaselessly in their attempts to create openings that just did not come their way.

Hopes that the inside-left problem had been solved conclusively by the recall of Cummins were doomed to disappointment because he failed signally to reproduce his form of two days earlier and was easily subdued by the stern tackling of the Rovers' defence.

INEXPERIENCE OF WINGERS

Add to that the fact that there was a very meagre contribution from the wingers, with both Walden and Fleming showing plain signs of inexperience and being too easily beaten and it is easy to see that the forward line added up to an uneven, misfiring affair again.

With the forwards unable to mount anything in the way of a concerted attack, there was a tremendous strain on the defence which had a good deal of trouble in combating the dash and enthusiasm of the Rovers' forwards.

Not for them the unnecessary frills of keeping the ball close on a pitch that was waterlogged as the result of heavy storms in the morning and which became worse under the impact of further showers.

Instead, they used the direct route, keeping the ball on the move and making use of the speed of their wingers.

These methods produced early results because BRADFORD gave them the lead after 19 minutes when he slammed in a rebound after Baynham had been unable to hold a drive from Sykes, and PETHERBRIDGE put them further ahead six minutes later.

In the latter case, I fancy that Baynham was unsighted because Bramwell, seeking to remedy the damage caused when he could not reach a centre from the left, tried to intercept the winger's shot.

PICKED HIS SPOT

Nine minutes after the resumption, HOOPER was able to pick his spot in the net after the ball had bobbed about in the Town goalmouth following a corner and even though the Town secured a lucky goal 12 minutes from time, they never promised to make a fight of it.

The goal came when Radford, saving a shot from Turner, saw the ball rebound, strike MABBUTT and roll into the net as defenders raced despairingly after it.

Even so, Rovers had the last say because, with four minutes

left, BRADFORD was allowed to go on from what seemed a palpably offside position and although Baynham beat out his first shot from point-blank range, the centre-forward made no mistake from the rebound.

Kept at full stretch from start to finish were the wing-halves, so that they were never able to dictate the midfield play and Kelly shone as brightly as anyone in the Town team through his sound defensive measures.

Dunne was very much at a loss against Watkins, making his debut for the home side, and while Bramwell had plenty to do, he was the more impressive full-back.

Safe handling of the ball in the difficult conditions was a chancy business, as Baynham found, but we had no chance to make a comparison with Radford because the Rovers' goalkeeper was never tested.

On the other hand, there was plenty for Baynham to do and, if he was not completely assured, at least no one could pin the blame for the defeat on him.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Radford; Hillard, Frowen; Sykes, Davis, Mabbutt; Petherbridge, Jones, Bradford, Hooper, Watkins.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; Dunne, Bramwell; Morton, Kelly, Groves; Walden, Ashworth, Turner, Cummins, Fleming.

Referee: J. K. Taylor, Wolverhampton. Attendance: 13,102.

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

"For the whole of the first half Luton were on the defence, scrambling the ball off their goal-line again and again as the Rovers, with their wing halves holding complete command in midfield, piled into the attack.

"Not much could be said about the Luton team except that, on this form, they looked far more likely candidates for relegation than the Rovers." — "Sunday Express."

"Luton flopped because Turner, scorer of four goals earlier in the week, could make no impression down the middle against inexperienced Joe Davis, playing his first League game in five years on Rovers' books." — "The People."

"Luton threatened for the first time in the 79th minute, when Turner broke through. He made a mess of the chance, hitting the ball against goalkeeper Radford, but it rebounded into the net off Mabbutt." — "News of the World."

"They outplayed and outmanoeuvred a sluggish Luton side that was on the defensive for 90 per cent of the game." — "Sunday Dispatch."

"No excuses for Luton. They had an off day. Gordon Turner after his four goals on Thursday against Stoke got in only one shot—a weak one." — "Daily Mail."

"Luton, however, will continue to live dangerously while their defence falters and their forwards persist in keeping the ball close on the heavy grounds." — "Daily Telegraph."