

Unseen punch robs Liverpool of home point

By HORACE YATES
LIVERPOOL 1, LUTON TOWN 1

61/62

Nothing will convince Liverpool that they did not beat Luton Town fairly and squarely, even though the record books, in the coldest of cold print, will provide unchallengeable evidence to the contrary. That such a painfully one-sided game, should erupt into the most explosive action seemed hardly believable, and yet, there we were, crowding the most exciting action of the match into the three closing, blistering minutes.

It would require a fiction writer of the most fertile imagination to produce a fanciful finale to match this true-to-life closing thrill, which sent feeling, on the field and off, up to boiling point.

Let us forget for a moment the fact that Liverpool had coasted through the match a goal ahead, hanks to Lewis, and the circumstances surrounding the Turner equaliser, three minutes from the end.

Only when Liverpool found themselves confronted with the near certainty of conceding a point for the second match in succession, did they really pull out all the stops and hurl their skill and fighting fury at a stubborn Luton.

We were in the last minute of the match when White nodded forward for A'Court to give the ball added momentum with another header. The winning goal seemed assured, as the ball struck the underside of the bar and came out.

UPRAISED ARM

There were St. John and McNally standing almost where the ball was dropping and it was St. John's head which connected. Although it is difficult to be over-emphatic from such a distance, it seemed to me that the ball had actually crossed the line when in a flash it was hooked out by an upraised arm.

Anfield fairly sizzled as the referee waved aside all protestations and instinctively everyone realised that the last chance to win the match had gone.

As I saw it St. John actually scored, but it is easy to forgive the referee a decision which depended on inches, especially as he was certainly no worse placed than the spectators, but I find it completely baffling that when so many saw the offending arm, the men who mattered, the referee and his linesmen, did not.

I thought it only fair to discover the Luton point of view and into the dressing-room I went to interview McNally. Grinning broadly, and quite willing to discuss the incident, he said: "The ball hit the bar and came out. I raised my hand and I would definitely have hit the ball out if it had come down, but it never did, and so there was no need for me to handle."

I accept that view completely, except that, as I saw it, it referred only to the first part of the incident. How the ball was pushed to safety by a header, which had no contact with the bar, is saying.

"We want the referee," but the demonstrators were dispersed without incident.

It would require a sheet of asbestos to quote safely manager Bill Shankly's views of this and other incidents, but my general impression was that he was neither amused nor happy about the whole affair.

Before Turner had restored equality in eighty-seven minutes, Liverpool had survived a momentary pounding of their goal. Turner, profiting from probably the only Yeats' slip of the game, hammered the ball against the bar, and Legate back-heeled the rebound towards goal, for Leishman to kick clear.

Turner raced into the picture again and shot past Slater, which sent the Liverpool players demonstrating their disapproval and skipper White accompanying the referee back to the centre line, pleading with him to consult the linesmen, the contention being that Turner was five or six yards offside.

The referee was happy with his own view of the incident and the goal stood.

No matter how worthy a case of gross miscarriage of justice Liverpool may be able to put up, they are faced with the inescapable conclusion that the dropping of a point was really nobody's fault but their own. Better finishing, just a trifle more accuracy, would have seen them four goals up at half time, completely impervious to anything Luton may have done or oversights that may have been made, but while a team relies on a single goal to see them through they must realise the risk of having to share the spoils is ever present.

Luton fought magnificently when they were so obviously inferior, and it could only have been the knowledge that with so little between them all was not lost.

DANGEROUS LEWIS

Lewis, deputy for the injured Hunt, scored in six minutes with a magnificent header, and although he was never completely impressive it is true that no other forward looked more dangerous.

I found it hard to understand why Liverpool should show little confidence in Ian Callaghan, the eighteen-year-old outside right, for it should have been obvious that his ability was more than sufficient to cope with the task confronting him.

The timing of his reintroduction has been most judicious and if there is no falling away in standards Callaghan must stay.

LIVERPOOL: Slater, White, Byrne, McNally, Yeats, Legate, Callaghan, Turner, Lewis, Hunt, A'Court.
LUTON: Slater, White, Byrne, McNally, Yeats, Legate, Callaghan, Turner, Lewis, Hunt, A'Court.
Referee: Mr. J. J. ...
Attendance: ...