

DEFENSIVE STOKE STOPPED THE TOWN

Negative Tactics Made Game A Dull Affair

LUTON TOWN 0, STOKE CITY 0

WHEN a team applies the theory, as Stoke did at Kenilworth-road on Saturday, that the safest way of ensuring that they gain an away point is to stop the opponents from scoring at all costs, then the game is not likely to be much of a spectacle.

And so it turned out, unfortunately, just when the Town had secured a crowd something approaching the average they need in order to make ends meet, though it was expected to be bigger than 15,163.

Nearly 5,000 more than saw the previous home match turned up to watch Stanley Matthews make a re-appearance at Luton, but they did not even have the satisfaction of seeing the old maestro turn on any of his former magic.

For Stanley was in very quiet vein indeed and, after an early indication from Bramwell that he was not in the mood to stand any nonsense, he did not try anything of a very ambitious nature.

While the continuance of Matthews in the game is obviously good for football in these days of few personalities, it was a pity to see him such a pale shadow of his former greatness.

Early on, Stoke did play some neat football, much of it too close and short to cause the Town defence too much trouble, but as time wore on they turned more and more completely to defence.

Constantly they packed their penalty area so that the Town, sadly lacking an inside forward with the ability to hold the ball and create openings, found it extremely difficult to get a clear shot at goal.

The few that did find the gap—and they included two worthy ones from McKechnie and Pacey—were splendidly dealt with by the capable O'Neill.

Some tough tackling had gone on from the start, and the play took on the character of a rough house towards half-time, when the referee came in for some booing from the crowd, who doubted the accuracy of some of his decisions.

TWO BOOKED BY REFEREE

Things came to a head when Walden and Andrew tangled and both had their names taken. For a few minutes this did not act as a deterrent, but eventually tempers cooled and for the rest of the match, although the tackling continued to be hard, there was less evidence of bad temper.

Even less prominent as an attacking force in the second half were Stoke who, long before the end, had given up everything but a token pretence of going on to the attack and all their endeavours were devoted towards keeping their score sheet blank.

The one hope for the Town seemed to be from a penalty kick, and there were one or two border-line cases, particularly when McKechnie was pulled down, but the referee would not listen to appeals.

In the closing minutes, the Town put up a heavy barrage on the Stoke goal, during which O'Neill thrillingly cut out dangerous crosses from Ashworth and Walden but, even though defenders came up to try their luck, the shut down in the visiting penalty area remained complete.

THIS NEED IS URGENT

After some of their previous free-scoring exploits, it was disappointing that the Town were not among the goals, but the game served to underline the fact that their need for a ball-playing inside-forward has become urgent. McKechnie is scarcely experi-

enced enough for the role and could rarely find an open space and Turner, trying to do some of the fetching and carrying, is being missed from his role purely as a spearhead.

During the first half, Ashworth, with his quick dashes, looked as likely as anyone to find a way through, but for some reason or another, he fell away after the interval.

Throughout, the attack looked badly balanced and incohesive, but they were faced by a difficult set of circumstances for which they were not sufficiently well equipped.

Neither Walden nor Legate really received the kind of service they needed and, of the two, the former was the more dangerous because Legate found Asprey a considerable stumbling block.

Without being driven to the lengths to which Stoke went, the defence was completely sound, with Cope showing a continuance of his improved form at Liverpool and giving his most satisfactory home display.

Both Pacey and Groves were well on top and Bramwell must have had a far easier match than he was expecting.

Toughest task of all was faced by McNally in trying to keep tabs on Ratcliffe who was easily the most lively of the Stoke forwards and this pair had a grim duel.

There was never much to worry Standen who found few shots coming his way, but when the necessity arose, his handling was always safe.

LUTON TOWN: Standen; McNally, Bramwell; Pacey, Cope, Groves; Walden, Ashworth, Turner, McKechnie, Legate.

STOKE CITY: O'Neill; Asprey, Allen; Howitt, Andrew, Skeels; Matthews, Mudie, Bullock, Thompson, Ratcliffe.

Referee: H. Horner, Coventry.