

# ATTACK FAILS TO PENETRATE STOKE BARRIER

By "Chiltern"

61/62

LUTON TOWN 0, STOKE CITY 0

IT was more like old times at Kenilworth-road this afternoon. With Stanley Matthews proving the attraction, the attendance had every appearance of being the biggest of the season.

Ten minutes before the start, it was considerably more than at the last home match. The crowd included a quite considerable following from Stoke, which was an indication of the inspiration that Matthews has brought since his return to the Potteries.

As nearly always happens in a case like this, there were rumours and counter-rumours circulating in the town this morning that Matthews would not be playing, but he was, and, in point of fact, there was never any doubt about his appearance.

The reason that prompted the rumour was that Stoke announced six forwards yesterday, but that was due to the fact that Tommy Thompson, who has been having intensive treatment for a bruised ankle, was not passed fit until this morning.

So, Nibloe, who has played only one game since joining Stoke from Sheffield United, became 12th man.

Of course, some of the resurgence of interest could be traced probably to the Town's good performance last week in gaining a point at Liverpool.

## TOWN'S FORWARD CHANGES

Despite that effort, they made a change which resulted in Jim Fleming losing his place at outside-right, in favour of Harry Walden.

In addition, the inside-forwards Alec Ashworth and Tommy McKechnie were switched, which was not surprising, because each has given the appearance of being happier on the opposite flank.

The pitch had been well rolled, and, although it looked on the soft side, it seemed just about as perfect as could be expected for this time of the year.

Teams:

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

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

Referee: H. Horner, Coventry.

Town were set to defend the Kenilworth-road end, and there was early cause for cheering by the Stoke fans when Matthews was put in possession, but disappointingly he placed the ball straight to the feet of Groves.

First move by the Town came from Turner down the left wing, but, hustled by Andrew, he could do no more than run the ball out of play.

## COPE PENALISED

Dangerous play by Cope brought a free-kick just outside the penalty area, from which Asprey made an excellent attempt to score, his terrific drive missing the post by a little over a foot.

Two bad clearances by McNally put Stoke on the attack, but in the end the right-back extricated himself from trouble by pushing the ball back to Standen as Ratcliffe challenged.

Stoke were looking the more menacing, and there were appeals for a penalty when Thompson went down heavily as Groves and McNally challenged, but the referee would have no part of it.

Much of the play was scrappy, and there was not much cohesion yet in the Town forward line. Standen was twice in action, cutting out centres from Bullock and Matthews.

Much of the Town's trouble could be pinned down to inaccuracy in passing, which became almost monotonous.

Walden galvanised the Town forwards into some sort of action by switching into the middle and then finding the oncoming Pacey with a through pass. Pacey, after first losing possession, recovered and beat two defenders before slipping the ball to McKechnie, but the inside-left was too slow and was robbed quite easily.

## ASHWORTH TRIES A LONG SHOT

Then, O'Neill had to come racing out of his goal to collect a forward pass by Pacey, for which Walden and Ashworth both made a great dash.

Just after this, Ashworth produced the first worth-while shot of the match, which had lasted exactly quarter of an hour. From an acute angle and longish range, he rammed the ball into the side netting.

Ashworth was the most progressive of the Town forwards, and after beating Skeels with a brilliant bit of footwork, he crossed the ball low, but there was no-one there to accept the chance.

Town persisted in their pressure, and Bramwell lofted the ball into

the penalty area, and when it came back McNally crossed a high centre which O'Neill caught only at the second attempt.

## STOKE HIT BACK DANGEROUSLY

Stoke's reply was immediate and dangerous because Bullock swung first time at a muffed clearance by Bramwell, and the ball whipped just over the bar.

Stoke's defence dearly got into a tangle when McKechnie pushed the ball through towards Ashworth. The inside-right seemed to be obstructed by Allen as he came across to cover, but the Town's appeals were turned down.

In the next minute there was not much doubt about the legitimacy of Stoke's appeals when Cope pulled down Skeels full-length some yard outside the penalty area.

Matthews went into the inside-left position to take the free kick as part of what seemed to be a pre-arranged plan, but it misfired badly, and the ball went tamely out of play.

From this, the Town made a quick thrust in which they came close to taking the lead, McKechnie cutting through for goal after being sent through by Ashworth, and his well-placed shot was pushed down one-handed by O'Neill as it seemed bound for the far corner of the net.

The Town were now looking the more dangerous, and O'Neill had to pull the ball from under the bar when Turner tried a header from a cross by Walden.

## FREE KICKS AGAINST TOWN

Several free kicks were awarded against the Town, including one against Walden, which the crowd judged to be a harsh decision.

Nothing came of it, however, and the Town swung back to the attack. Walden found Ashworth out on the right, wing, and his centre was brilliantly pulled down by O'Neill, who fell but retained possession of the ball.

Matthews was not very much in the picture, and was certainly not the menace he has been on previous occasions.

Ratcliffe made poor use of a chance made for him by Thompson, sending the ball tamely to Standen.

McNally was having some trouble in coping with Ratcliffe, and deflected the ball behind for a corner, but Pacey swept it out of the danger zone, and play moved to the other end again.

Stoke defence was leaving few gaps, and Town were finding difficulty in getting to close quarters.

A storm of booing for the referee came when Matthews went down when tackled by Ashworth, and obviously handled the ball as he did so. However, instead of giving the Town a free kick, the referee awarded

Stoke one on the ground that Ashworth had fouled the winger.

## TOWN'S ATTACKING WING-HALVES

Neat work by McKechnie and Legate provided further work for the Stoke defence, but this penalty area was tightly packed and two shots from Groves were beaten down.

At this stage, Pacey and Groves were being seen in an attacking role, and they inspired the next series of raids. In one of them Pacey nearly beat O'Neill with a shot from the edge of the penalty area, the goalkeeper just managing to push out with considerable difficulty.

O'Neill made a brilliant catch from a corner by Walden, and then there was a further injury when McNally tackled Ratcliffe and was penalised for it.

The damage was not serious, and play resumed with a free kick to Stoke which Allen placed into the goalmouth, only for it to be cleared by Groves.

The referee had a word with Cope after he had pulled down Ratcliffe heavily a yard or so outside the penalty area. The free kick was cleared by the dominating, Pacey, and the Town made ground again, though still without being able to create a clear-cut scoring chance.

## INTO THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK

There was an outbreak of trouble between Andrew and Walden after the winger had been fouled, and the referee took both aside after players in each team had pulled them apart.

His book came out and he certainly booked the name of Andrew, and it looked as if Walden's went into the book as well.

There had been earlier signs of bad temper, and after this, things heated up considerably, with McNally being penalised for tripping Ratcliffe. It looked as if some firm control was needed to stamp out this roughness.

There was a free kick against Ashworth, though the home fans seemed to think that Skeels was the offender.

This brought more booing and some stamping of feet from some of the stand occupants.

Still the roughness continued, and McKechnie was brought down by Skeels. O'Neill was forced to punch away the free-kick and there was a terrific scramble in front of the Stoke goal, ending with the half-time whistle. Half-time:

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| LUTON | 0 |
| STOKE | 0 |

At half-time the referee confirmed that he had taken the names of both Walden and Andrew.

The second half began with the Town on the attack, but again the Town were faced with a packed penalty area.

Free kicks continued to be frequent, and there came another when Groves knocked over Thompson as he went up for a high ball.

But Stoke were showing little attacking power and seldom caused Standen any trouble.

## FREE KICK TO TOWN

When the Stoke defence was pulled out of position for once, Legate had come too far in to meet Walden's centre, and the ball soared over his head.

The referee had another word with Andrew after a tackle which brought the Town a free kick. McNally lifted the ball into the penalty area, but Legate was checked in his attempt to force a way through.

Andrew was again penalised when he dived over Turner's shoulder in an attempt to head the ball away, and Groves placed the free kick square to Pacey, but the

right-half was well off the target with his quickly-made shot.

Then Cope fouled Bullock after the Stoke centre-forward had seized on a mistake by Pacey. Thompson took the free kick a yard outside the penalty area. For safety, Cope headed behind, but the corner caused no more than a mild fluttering in front of the Town goal.

There were appeals from the crowd for a penalty when McKechnie was bowled over, but they were ignored by the referee.

The Town were more dangerous now and Stoke had a narrow escape from a low cross by McKechnie.

## MATTHEWS IN THE PICTURE

Matthews came into the picture, giving a pass to Thompson, whose long-range effort was uncomfortably close.

Bramwell came up to try a shot, but was off the mark, and then Turner came weaving in from the left, but again Stoke had closed their ranks. Next, Pacey lofted the ball into the goalmouth, but O'Neill made a safe catch as Ashworth challenged.

## STOKE MAN INJURED

There was a hold up while Skeels had attention after being hurt in a tackle with McKechnie, but he was able to resume, limping rather gingerly.

A better than usual attempt from Stoke came from Ratcliffe after he had switched into the middle, but, like most of the other shots in this match, it was off the target.

Then O'Neill handled brilliantly again in pulling down a centre by Walden.

It was nearly all Luton now in their search for the elusive winner, but they could seldom get beyond the edge of the Stoke penalty area.

## TOWN PILE ON PRESSURE

With only a few minutes remaining there was a sudden assault on the Stoke goal, but again Turner was crowded out.

There was excitement when Ashworth came racing through, but O'Neill made a diving save from his centre.

Another scramble in front of the Stoke goal ended with Groves heading too high.

Then McNally joined the attack and Cope followed suit, but this tightly packed defence was just defeating the best endeavours of the Town. Result:

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| LUTON TOWN | 0 |
| STOKE CITY | 0 |