

TOWN LET ROVERS OFF THE HOOK

Lacked Punch And A Bit Of Luck At Bristol

By CHILTERN

61/62

BRISTOL ROVERS 1, LUTON TOWN 0

A CUSTOMER sitting behind me at Eastville on Saturday, remarked to his neighbour as the first half was drawing to a close, "This team scored three goals in the first half against Rotherham last week." Quickly came the reply, "They should have had four by now."

Which was perhaps a little exaggerated, but the plain fact is that the Town should have been two up in the first quarter of an hour and then the other two might easily have followed as a logical conclusion.

In fact, had the Town made the most of the tremendous supremacy they showed in the opening stages, then I am certain that they would have coasted to equally as comfortable a victory as they achieved at Norwich.

They had the Rovers on their knees, with their defence at sixes and sevens and their forwards completely out of the game, but for lack of final thrust, they allowed them to recover.

Like a well-oiled machine, the Town attack, with the wing-halves backing up, completely dominated the proceedings at the start and only the woodwork kept out an effort from Walden after Radford had saved a header by Ashworth.

Walden had another chance, but the expected goal never came and, with the machine clogging a little, the Rovers, having been let off the hook, began to display more confidence and came into the game more as an attacking force.

However, apart from a couple of raking drives by Hooper which missed the target narrowly, they did not cause the Town defence much trouble, and it seemed that the least the Town could look forward to was a goalless draw.

So, it came as a rude shock when in the 62nd minute, HAMILTON slipped through the Town defence to dribble around Standen and hook the ball into an empty net. Appeals for offside were turned down.

SHOWED MORE URGENCY

For the first time, the home fans began to believe that Rovers could win this match and urged on by the biggest roar 9,668 supporters could muster, they rocked the Town for a few minutes.

That storm did not last because the Town slipped back into their stride again, this time showing more urgency in attack than had been the case previously. This could be traced partly to the whole-hearted endeavours of Pacey who became a sixth forward and was unlucky on a couple of occasions.

With 12 minutes left, Ashworth seemed to have set the stage for a grand-stand finish when he rammed the ball past Radford, only to find a linesman signalling for off-side which he could not have been, because the ball went to him off Pyle's head.

However, the referee disallowed the goal because, he said afterwards, McKechnie had fouled the centre-half, with which the inside-forward disagreed. Indeed, he averred that Pyle had fouled him.

Even so, the Town kept at it, but that this was not their lucky day was evident when Walden made a great low drive that struck the foot of the far post and came back into play.

Certainly, justice was not served, but the Town have only themselves to blame. They should have cashed in on that great start, but generally their finishing was lacking in thrust and there was altogether too much fanciful play from the inside trio.

TOO MUCH ACROSS-THE-FIELD PASSING

Continually the ball was moved across the field instead of forward, which has been the pattern of Town's successes in the past, and neither Ashworth nor McKechnie took over the spear-head role that was expected from them.

Indeed, both were often working in midfield, where Groves could have been left to his own devices. Recall of Groves to the attack was not a great success because although he provided the link with the middle line, he was not forthright enough in his work and he did not produce the necessary through balls.

Most threat came from Walden, who was altogether too speedy for Frowen, and there was the constant promise of threat from Fleming which, somehow or another, seemed to amount to very little in the end.

There was little wrong with the defence which covered well and gave the moderate Rovers' forwards little scope.

Cope made sure that the vastly experienced Bradford did not become a danger and both Morton and Pacey did a pretty effective job, with each prominent in attack at times.

Bramwell turned in a sound game against Jarman, but McNally had more trouble with Hooper mainly because the winger made space for himself by lying deep and he was

always a marksman to be feared.

On the whole there was not a great deal for Standen to do, but he did pull off one remarkable save during the second half.

BRISTOL ROVERS: Radford; Davis, Frowen; Bumpstead, Pyle, Slocombe; Jarman, Hamilton, Bradford, Watkins, Hooper.

LUTON TOWN: Standen; McNally, Bramwell; Morton, Cope, Pacey; Walden, Groves, Ashworth, McKechnie, Fleming. Referee: D. H. Howell, Birmingham.