

SHABBY TOWN WERE NEVER IN IT

61/62

Did Not Recover From Shock Of Two Early Goals

By CHILTERN

PRESTON NORTH END 2, LUTON TOWN 0

THIS was one of the shabbiest performances I can recall from a Town team since the days when they were haunted by that bogey of relegation from the First Division.

Thinking back over this dreary 90 minutes, I find it difficult to apportion any praise at all, except, maybe, to over-worked defenders like McNally, Bramwell and Cope who mostly had to carry the burden of weaknesses forward.

Had there been some signs of method in the attack and had they played the sort of constructive football in midfield that they have produced so many times this season, no-one would have been quite so disappointed at their showing.

But, there was just no mitigating circumstance. No midfield sorcery and, surprisingly, in view of the lesson they learned the hard way at Bristol the previous week, little exploitation of the through pass.

To say that the Town badly missed such an inexperienced player as McKechnie, who has less than a score of League games behind him may seem a stupid thing to say but, nevertheless, it has the ring of truth.

Certainly, none of the three inside-forwards came up to his standard and the display from Groves was such an acute disappointment that he was switched to left-half in the course of six changes which Manager Sam Bartram made at half-time.

In changing the whole forward line set-up so that it read, Fleming, Walden, Ashworth, Pacey, Lornie, he hoped to bring the sense of urgency that had been missing completely in the first-half when the Town's display, in keeping with the general tempo of the game, was of a strictly pedestrian nature.

AMBITIOUS PLAN MISFIRED

Ambitious his changes were, but they misfired badly and, within 20 minutes, the front line was back in much the same formation as that in which it began.

What took the stuffing out of the Town were two goals in the first eight minutes, both from the boot of BIGGS, who is now beginning to justify the £18,000 price tag Bristol Rovers put on him during the summer.

Twice he found himself in an open space, due to some shocking covering by the Town defence and, each time, he exacted full toll.

For the first, Standen should have been out to cut off the ball, but he hesitated and was lost and when the second came, he slipped as he made his rather tentative advance.

So far as the Town were concerned, the match might just as well have ended then, because apart from a snap-shot by Ashworth, which Kelly clawed down, and an effort by Lornie, that trickled just wide, a goal looked far away.

In fact, Preston, using the through pass effectively, had much the better scoring chances and both Biggs and Dawson should have increased their lead before half-time.

The second half was one long bore with Preston still not making the best use of their opportunities, otherwise the Town would have been on the receiving end of a thrashing.

PROBLEMS ARE MANIFOLD

Preston are a better side than their lowly position would suggest, but that does not excuse the Town for this sub-standard display.

Mr. Bartram's problems at the moment are manifold. Obviously, Lornie must come out because his contribution was almost unnoticeable, and Fleming is another who is due for relegation on the score of his lack of accuracy.

Ashworth showed more determination than most, but it did not avail him much, and Walden achieved little except to get at cross purposes with Ross.

As for Groves, he must be due for a return to the half-back line, which probably means that there will be no place for Morton, who will be unlucky if he is dropped because he was a long way from being the worst player on view.

In fact, he tried his hardest to ake this game by the scruff of the neck in the first half, but he and Pacey found that the response from the men in front was practically negligible.

McNally, Cope and Bramwell

all suffered from being over-worked with the ball coming back at them continually, but at least they kept at it with a will and never gave up.

As for Standen, a couple of smart second-half saves wiped out some of the memory of those two simple goals, but I fancy that his continuance as first choice is hanging by a slender thread.

PRESTON NORTH END:
Kelly; Cunningham, Ross; Wylie, Singleton, Smith; Wilson, Biggs, Dawson, Spavin, Thompson.

LUTON TOWN: Standen; McNally, Bramwell; Morton, Cope, Pacey; Walden, Ashworth, Lornie, Groves, Fleming.

Referee: G. McCabe, Sheffield.

Attendance: 8,702.