

FOOTBALL RARITY SANK THE TOWN

WHAT THE
OTHER
CRITICS
SAID

Matthews Goal Put Paid To Their Survival Hopes

By CHILTERN

62/63

STOKE CITY 2, LUTON TOWN 0

ONE of those rare football gems, a STANLEY MATTHEWS goal, finally sealed the Town's fate so far as continuance in the Second Division was concerned.

For Stoke, it was a story-book ending because it clinched their bid for First Division status and sent the crowd of 33,644 into ecstasies.

For the Town it was the end of the rocky road of hard endeavour to rid themselves of the dark shadow that has been hanging over them almost from the first day of the season.

The goal came at the most vital moment—the second minute of the second-half—when the Town were probably gathering together their forces for an all-out assault in order to eliminate the one goal lead Stoke held at half-time.

Indeed, when Matthews raced a considerable distance down the middle, the Town defence was all over the place, with only Bramwell within challenging distance, and he could not get in a tackle on the maestro.

Baynham did the only thing open to him by coming out, but he seemed to slip in the process and Matthews was around him in a trice before firmly steering the ball into the net.

What made matters worse for the Town was that this was the right winger's first goal of the season and someone said to me afterwards when, during the jubilation, the Town's calamity had been overlooked, "This was Matthews's day."

It was the Town's day, too—but a day of doom which casts them back into the Third Division for the first time since 1937.

Early on, I thought that they were going to make a real fight of hanging on to their faint hope because, on the artificially watered pitch, they settled down the more quickly only to experience the ill-luck that so often attends the struggling.

BALL SLAMMED AGAINST BAR

That was when Davies made a low centre from the left, Turner and Allen lunged at it together and from the full-back's foot the ball slammed against the bar to rebound into the waiting hands of O'Neill.

A goal at that stage might have made all the difference because Stoke did not look at all happy under pressure during the early stages. However, they profited from their let-off and proceeded to play some neat football in approach which did not amount to a great deal in terms of goal-mouth punch.

Indeed, there was not a great deal of danger to the Town goal, but the first blow came after 33 minutes when Allen and Skeels participated in a move as the result of which the ball was lofted into the goalmouth.

Out came Baynham but, impeded by one of his own defenders, he could not grasp the ball, and MUDIE was there to calmly lob the ball in, defeating McNally's attempt to clear off the line.

After that goal from Matthews, the Town hardly ever functioned as a smooth unit in attack and scarcely a direct shot reached O'Neill during the second half.

On the other hand, Stoke had several chances, missed either through their own remissness or

through smart goalkeeping by Baynham, who came through with considerable credit.

As a whole, the defence did well enough to keep the Town in the game long enough for the forwards to produce some result, and that has been the case in so many matches this season.

Groves came back to left-half after a longish absence to produce one of his old-time displays and Morton was again in capable mood.

Again Kelly was strong and determined, but he was bothered quite a lot by the quickness of Mudie who did not try to hold on to the ball, but kept prodding it about astutely.

Almost throughout, Ratcliffe kept McNally at full stretch, while Bramwell had the tough task of marking the local idol. Shrewdly, the rest of the Stoke team kept the ball away from Matthews for longish periods, but when he had possession of it, he began to spell out trouble for the Town.

Forward, Davies was far below his recent form, neither McKechnie nor Jardine impressed on the wings and the effectiveness of McGuffie, who never looked the answer at inside-left, was cut down considerably after he pulled a muscle just before half-time.

No one could fault Turner on the score of lack of hard work because he covered a tremendous amount of ground, but one feels that his recent role, necessary though it might have been, has been alien to him.

Finally, it must be emphasised that the Town lost this match, or perhaps more truthfully, lost any chance of winning it, because they did not show sufficient of the spirit of all-out attack.

STOKE CITY. — O'Neill; Asprey, Allen; Clamp, Stuart, Skeels; Matthews, Viollet, Mudie, McIlroy, Ratcliffe.

LUTON TOWN. — Baynham; McNally, Bramwell; Morton, Kelly, Groves; McKechnie, Turner, Davies, McGuffie, Jardine.

Referee. — E. T. Jennings, Stourbridge. Attendance.—33,644.

"Luton are relegated and Stoke go up as Champions—and with the final glorious flourish of a goal from Stanley Matthews, himself, the ageing genius of baffling ball control, but who has never ranked marksmanship among his glittering array of talents.

It was his first of the season, a fairy-tale climax in an incomparable career." — "Sunday Telegraph."

"After the early menace of Turner and Jardine, Luton were never in the game again. Their defence battled bravely and at least helped keep the goal tally respectable." — "Sunday Express."