

LATE GOAL SPOILT TOWN AWAY RECORD

Another Hard-Fought Struggle With The Vale

By Chiltern

PORT VALE 1, LUTON TOWN 0

JUST four minutes stood between the Town and the continuance of their unbeaten away sequence into double figures at rain-swept Vale Park on Monday.

Just has had been the two previous meetings between these teams last week, this had been a hard-fought, fast match which never held out the promise of many goals, mainly because of the strength of the respective defences and the inability of the forwards to accept snap chances.

A goalless draw seemed certain and that point would have been invaluable to the Town as a sort of rehabilitation after their vicissitudes at Kenilworth-road last week.

The Town defence had absorbed most of what the home attack could muster and there seemed no doubt they could weather the last few minutes.

Then happened one of those things that can alter the course of a game completely.

In a sharp attack by the Town, Hancock seemed to help a low shot by Whittaker around the post. Certainly, the goalkeeper was in no doubt that he had done so because he kicked the ball in the direction of the corner flag.

However, seeing no reaction from either referee or linesman, he quickly retrieved it, and it was from his goal kick that the movement that brought the vital goal began.

Some frenzied defence work staved off the first threat, but the danger was never completely cleared and the ball went over towards the Town right flank from Poole.

Reid could have played safe but did not, so that the ball was intercepted and **CHEESEBROUGH** gained possession.

No more than 10 yards from goal, he was able to control the ball without being challenged and flashed it between the near post and Baynham, who might have been unsighted.

NO TIME FOR A COME-BACK

There was no time for any come-back by the Town and Vale had registered their first victory of the season to the delight of the 6,381 present.

When the goal came, the danger from the home team seemed to have evaporated because heavy pressure during which both Smith and Steele hit the bar with Baynham beaten, had been driven off.

On this greasy pitch, the better football came from the Town, who pushed the ball about blithely in the first half when they might very easily have taken the lead.

Whittaker missed the far post by a narrow margin and then should have done better than blaze the ball over when he met it on the volley, and the best effort of the first half came from Pleat, who made a great shot that flew inches wide of the angle of the woodwork.

A goal at this stage might well have sealed victory for the Town, but it just would not come and Hancock, well out of his goal, made a fine save from Pacey following a corner.

Yet there were one or two close calls at the Luton end, too, especially when Cheesebrough headed inches wide.

So the cut and thrust nature of the play continued after the interval when Baynham made fine saves from Cheesebrough and Rowland, while at the other end, Reid brought Hancock to his knees and McKechnie missed an excellent opportunity of scoring the first, vital goal.

Then came the bout of Vale pressure against which the Town

defence held firm and, with play transferred to the other end, Pleat, with a diving header, and McKechnie, made good scoring attempts.

SHORTCOMINGS AGAIN

Once again, there were shortcomings in most departments of the Town line-up, and with O'Rourke firmly in the grip of Nicholson, who never gave him any scope, and looking only a shadow of the free-scoring leader of last season, there was a lack of punch.

This was especially so in view of the additional fact that McKechnie, despite the amount of ground he covered, was much out of touch.

Best of the forwards was Pleat, who could again have benefited from better support, but there was a tremendous amount of work, particularly from Reid, who caught the eye with some accurate cross-field passes.

Whittaker chased up and down willingly and effectively in his terrier-like fashion, but his attempts to reach the dead-line were often forestalled by Alcock.

Once again there was not complete command at wing-half, where Pacey, well below his best form, is having a harassing time and even his distribution suffered.

Although he was often struggling, Lownds was the more effective, but the main half-back honours went quite decisively to Fincham, who was the master in the middle of the field.

As in the home match, Bramwell was worried by the speed of Rowland but, commendably, he stuck to his task and took the measure of the winger better in the second half than he did before the interval when there was much danger from this quarter.

The quickness of McBain enabled him to keep pretty firm tabs on the other speed merchant, Smith. Baynham's handling of the greasy ball was very certain but, possibly because of the floodlights, he was well beaten when two shots hit the cross-bar.

PORT VALE: Hancock; Alcock, Sproson; Steele, Nicholson, Miles; Rowland, Poole, Mitchell, Cheesebrough, Smith.

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; McBain, Bramwell; Pacey, Fincham, Lownds; Pleat, McKechnie, O'Rourke, Reid, Whittaker.

Referee: K J Seddon, Southport.