

TOWN HAD NEITHER THE SKILL NOR POWER TO SUCCEED

Deplorable Finishing By Both Teams

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 0, SOUTHEND UNITED 1

THERE was a scare this morning about the ability of David Pleat to play in this afternoon's home match with Southend United because of a heavy cold.

To cover the situation, Tommy McKechnie was called out of the reserve team which left for Brighton, but, in the event, Pleat made a quick recovery, so that the Town were able to field the side which they had announced.

This included 17-years-old Bruce Rioch at outside-left for his first League game. He came in for Ray Whittaker, who has pulled a groin muscle. The Town made no other change, and Southend were also altered in one position compared with the team beaten here by the only goal in the Cup-tie a fortnight ago.

This was at right-half, where their captain, Tony Bentley, returned after recovering from flu.

The attendance was very thin and, judging by what was happening on the Dunstable-road, some of this could be attributed to the overtime ban by Luton Corporation bus crews. Buses were infrequent and at almost every stop there were some who obviously intended to come to the match.

It was a cold, grey afternoon,

TEAMS

LUTON TOWN: Baynham; McBain, Jardine; Lownds, Caleb, Bramwell; Pleat, Harber, Riddick, Reid, Rioch.

SOUTHEND UNITED: McKechnie; Costello, Neal; Bentley, Watson, Bradbury, Slater, Smillie, Smith, Gilfillan, McKinven.

Referee: K. H. Burns, Dudley.

and the pitch looked in good condition after the rain.

There were early raids by both teams, and for Southend, Smillie shot wide from a good position. Two corners conceded by Lownds and Rioch kept Southend on the attack, and twice Baynham came out in dominating style to collect loose balls inside the penalty area.

Then, Gilfillan broke through in menacing style, but Caleb tackled him firmly just when trouble seemed to be brewing.

In a quick thrust by the Town, Rioch made an accurate centre which Harber hooked over from close range. At the other end, McKinven shot wide from a cross by Slater.

There was a lot of scrappy play, with Southend looking slightly the more dangerous, and a shot by Smillie was deflected only inches wide for a corner.

SOUTHEND GO AHEAD

In the tackle, Smillie was injured and there was a hold-up while he was attended to.

There should have been a goal to Southend when Bentley came right through a gap in the Town defence, chased vainly by Reid. Baynham came out, but, with the net yawning in front of him, Bentley missed his kick, and fell over in the process.

However, Southend's first goal was not long delayed, because a minute later, in the 18th, SMILLIE gave them the lead with a great rising drive from 20 yards.

Bradbury pushed the ball through to him, and Smillie swung away first time, beating Baynham as the goalkeeper went up, though I should say that he had a clear view of the ball all along its flight.

Under pressure the Town defence was not looking at all happy, and they were in luck when a shot by Smith struck Bramwell on the legs and was deflected inches wide of the near post.

From the corner kick Smith got up above everyone else to head just too high.

The ball was flashing across the Town goal from either wing with monotonous and dangerous regularity. In fact, so far Town had

shown no suggestion at all of smoothness and cohesion.

About the only notable happening near the Southend goal was a shot by Pleat from the inside-left position, but the ball flew far too high.

NO SPARK IN TOWN'S ATTACK

Again the Town were being guilty of misplaced passes, and there was almost no sign of spark in their attack. In fact, Southend were looking the more assured, better balanced side.

Rioch lived things up a bit with a good tackle on Slater and a pass to Riddick. The Town leader found Reid in the open space, but the inside-left ended the move by placing the ball straight to a defender.

After that Jardine most unnecessarily gave away a corner with no-one within breathing distance of him, a sure sign that no-one in defence had shouted. From the corner kick Baynham had to move quickly to pull down a header by Smillie, after which in a brief Town burst the ball was sent straight at McKechnie.

Somewhat or other, the Town goal escaped when Gilfillan made a low cross that Smillie tried to

scoop in. In fact the inside-right should have done so, because he was within a six-yards line. In the end there was a free-kick to the Town for some reason that was not patent.

RIOCH DOES SOME GOOD WORK

Town's nearest approach to a goal came when Rioch, who was making some useful centres, crossed the ball well. Harber touched it inside, and Riddick met it, not too squarely, and McKechnie made an unorthodox save by kicking away first time.

The danger was not cleared and there came a corner kick from which Riddick headed in firmly, forcing McKechnie to go full length to save.



When Southend hit back a shot by McKinven was pulled down from under the bar by Baynham.

Suddenly there was action at either end, sparked off by the two left-wingers. First Baynham made an acrobatic catch from McKinven, and then Rioch, receiving a pass from Harber, crashed in a shot, but it went straight at McKechnie, who was able to parry it.

A foul by Caleb on Smith brought Southend a free kick ten yards or so outside the penalty area. The ball stayed at the Town end, and eventually Baynham went full-length to save from Gilfillan.

Once again, the absence of midfield build-up and of discernible plan was defeating the Town, who were ragged in the extreme.

Towards half-time Southend put on more pressure, but their

How The Goals Came

SMILLIE for Southend after 18 minutes.

finishing was not impressive. Half-time:

LUTON TN. 0
SOUTHEND 1

The first notable incident of the second half was a long run down the left wing by Jardine, but he became too ambitious in the end and was dispossessed. Southend replied with a thrust by McKinven, whose shot Baynham watched float just over the bar.

Riddick worked the ball cleverly before passing to Rioch, and he responded with a well-placed centre which McKechnie saved with some difficulty.

Twice, Harber was beaten to through passes by the quick emergence of McKechnie, and then, as the ball was moved to the other end, there was a collision between Smith and Caleb, but it turned



Graham Caleb, Town's centre-half, was injured early in the second half, and had to leave the field. He was soon back, however, and apparently little the worse.

out to be not so serious as seemed likely at first sight

Caleb was seen to stagger, however, and was led off the field for further attention.

Lownds moved to centre-half, with Reid dropping back to wing-half. This happened after 51 minutes, and the Town could ill-afford to be down to ten men in their present circumstances.

CROWD BOOS SOUTHEND

Next, Riddick was shaken up as the result of a tackle by Watson, and there were boos from the crowd when Harber went down near goal with no action taken by the referee.

Caleb was now being walked along the touchline by trainer Stan Bentham, and it looked as if he was en route for the dressing room.

Naturally, Southend were making use of the open spaces which were resulting, and Slater whipped the ball just wide of the post from inside the penalty area.

A corner-kick followed this, and Baynham came yards out of his goal to pluck the ball out of the air.

Then, it proved that the pessimism about Caleb had not been justified because, after being off for five minutes, he came back and went to outside-left, still looking shaken.

This took Rioch for the time being at any rate to his natural position of inside-left, but it did not last long, because Caleb, seemingly recovered, went back to centre-half.

And he was just in time to see



Seventeen-years-old Bruce Rioch, who turned out for his first League game today.

Smillie miss a great chance of increasing Southend's lead when he headed wide after being left unattended following a free kick.

RIDDICK WASTES A CHANCE

Riddick should have made better use of a chance at the edge of the penalty area than to hook the ball tamely wide with time in which to control it.

There were loud shouts for a penalty when Jardine appeared to have been brought down from behind after a foray into the Southend goalmouth, but the referee would hear nothing of them.

Again there were shouts for a penalty when Watson looked to handle a centre by Pleat, and again they were refused. The



attack fizzled out with Rioch crashing across the face of the goal.

A long free kick by Jardine looked promising for the Town, but when the ball went out to Reid he fell to weight of numbers. Pleat tried to force the ball through, and Bradbury was left injured on the ground, but recovered after attention.

In a sudden breakaway, Rioch held off a tackle by Costello and very nearly beat McKechnie with a low drive that threatened to creep in at the foot of the near post. Just before this effort Rioch had hurt his right knee and was limping quite heavily now.

The better chances were falling to Southend, and Gilfillan shot over from close in after Jardine had got a foot to a centre by Slater.

FIGHT, BUT LITTLE ELSE

There was fight, but little else, from the Town as they sought to salvage a point with some now heavy pressure, but the sad fact was that their passing was never accurate enough to give hope of finding a gap through the Southend defence.

Pleat, who had mostly been kept quiet, tried to find a way down the wing, but was stopped by Neal, and although play had now settled in the Southend half,

scoring opportunities were just not being created.

In fact, Southend were covering up well and using the ball skilfully out of defensive positions. Twice the referee got in the way of Southend clearances, which, however, did not help the Town.

Town's phase on the attack ended without anything promising emerging from it. In fact, this will go down as a game in



which the finishing was almost indescribably below standard.

Bentley tried a shot from the edge of the penalty area which suffered the same fate as so many others by flying well wide.

NEARLY A SLIP UP

There was nearly a mishap at the Town end when Jardine allowed a through pass to run on. Baynham, taken by surprise, just managed to stick out a hand in time.

McKechnie was brought into action, not very seriously, in pulling down a floating centre by Pleat, and then came out in a hurry to make sure that a back pass by Watson was not intercepted by Harber, who was quickly off the mark.

Now the Town were building up for a late rally, but they were still not creating the openings that promised goals. There was a centre from Reid that landed on the wrong side of the bar, and that was just the net result of their efforts.

Then, Baynham had to come out almost to the edge of the penalty area to grab an awkwardly bouncing ball.

There just was not sufficient skill or thrust in this Town attack to suggest that they could save a point. Result:

LUTON 0
SOUTHEND 1