

Town flop badly against Walsall

64/65 By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 1, WALSTALL 3

YESTERDAY, just when the Town wanted to reach their peak, not only to pick up vital points in their relegation struggle, but to impress their biggest gate since Exeter were here on September 12—9,353—they flopped badly.

What was hoped would be a triumphant occasion turned out to be a shabby affair, with Walsall more comfortable winners than the score would suggest.

Town's disappointing performance drew the comment from chairman Tom Hodgson: "After a display like that we do not deserve to stay up."

Not only did the Town show a lack of football ability, but a strange and unexpected lack of determination in certain positions.

Few of the side added to their reputations. From me high marks would go only to Tinsley (who had no chance with any of the goals), Jardine and Harber, with certain reservations about Reid, who did a tremendous amount of covering.

Maybe the writing was on the wall in the second minute when Sissons split the Town defence with a glorious pass, and Barton was not quick enough to challenge as Taylor fastened on to the ball.

Quickly he swept it over low, and CLARKE, in an unmarked position, crashed it into the net.

There was some show of resistance from the Town after this, and hopes rose when PHILLIPS headed an equaliser from a free-kick by Barton after seven minutes.

This was one of many similar awards, and for a time play threatened to get out of hand, but the referee took firm control, and calmed things down, in the process of which he took McMoran's name.

Although the Town had much of the play, there was no pattern about their attack, and it was a strange thing that Phillips, supposed to be the spearhead, was often lying back among his half-backs.

WALSALL DEFENCE WELL ORGANISED

O'Rourke who, along with Riddick, had a poor game, missed one of the few clear-cut chances when he failed to control a pass from Phillips.

So well organised was the Walsall defence that the Town were seldom able to bring Carling into action and,

when Walsall broke out, their forwards, with Clarke finding the open spaces, were very dangerous.

Sure enough, it was CLARKE, playing mostly at centre-forward and on whom Fincham never got to grips, even in the air, who restored the Walsall lead in the 26th minute following slack defensive play.

One hoped for a similar transformation as happened against Barnsley when the second half began, but after some preliminary flurry, the Town forwards faded out of the picture and, apart from a header by Phillips that went wide, Walsall were not in much trouble.

The equaliser just did not look like coming, and it did not need a goal by TAYLOR 14 minutes from the end to seal the Town's fate.

A headed clearance by Gibson went straight to the outside-left, who hammered in a great drive that beat Tinsley's despairing dive.

All down the Town's right flank there was weakness, with Barton not quick enough in the tackle, Gibson out of touch, and, apart from O'Rourke being below par, Pleat never got out of the grip of Harris. In addition, Fincham was too often out of position and did not dominate the middle.

PHILLIPS TAMED

Although Phillips, obviously after half-time instructions, took over more of an attacking role afterwards, he was seldom dangerous, and Bennett, a highly promising, young centre-half, came out very much on top.

In essence, the Town's display was merely a continuation of their pathetic display at Southend last Saturday.

LUTON TOWN: Tinsley; Barton, Jardine; Gibson, Fincham, Reid; Pleat, O'Rourke, Phillips, Riddick, Harber.

WALSALL: Carling; Gregg, Harris; Sissons, Bennett, Atthey, Satchwell, Clarke, Hodgkisson, McMoran, Taylor.

Referee: R. Tinkler, Boston.