

TOWN RIDING HIGH AFTER BRILLIANT

READ HAT-TRICK

Further boost to promotion hopes

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 5, NOTTS COUNTY 1

RAIN through the night and all morning and continuing right up to kick-off time must have daunted the ardour of many of the Town fans, so that the Kenilworth Road terraces were thinly populated five minutes before kick-off time this afternoon.

In fact so heavy was the rain that in my own mind I had some doubt about whether play would be possible. This doubt was shared by many supporters, because the club's telephone scarcely stopped ringing all morning.

In fact had this been some four or five years ago, before the latest drainage was effected I do not think this match would have been on.

In the event, the referee was on the scene before one o'clock, and he pronounced the pitch playable. But conditions deteriorated in the ensuing two hours and the ground was pretty badly waterlogged at the start.

After their cup win over Romford on Thursday, the Town contented themselves with only one change, at inside-left, where Graham French—ineligible for the cup ties—came in for Jimmy Gibson.

On the other hand, following the cup defeat at Southend last Saturday, Notts County, one place above Luton in the League table, made sweeping changes which involved five players losing their places.

The County were in all yellow, which was an unusual strip, to say the least.

SENSATIONAL LEAD

The Town defended the Oak Road end, their favourite manoeuvre these days, and were quickly on the attack with O'Rourke sending away Harber.

With three minutes gone, the Town went into a sensational lead, in keeping with their recent form in home matches. It was an unusual sort of goal but WHITTAKER gets credit for it. He picked up a loose ball, closed in dangerously and his shot struck either Coates or Butler, and was deflected into the net.

It could have come into the category of an "own goal," but Whittaker certainly did all the work leading up to it.

Brilliant work by French in midfield took the Town on to the attack again, but this time they were driven off and when County hit back Moore came across decisively to kick away a pass intended for Still. Obviously the long pass,

How the goals came

WHITTAKER for Luton after 3 minutes.

SHIELDS for Notts County after eight minutes.

READ for Luton after 16 minutes.

O'ROURKE for Luton after 43 minutes.

READ for Luton after 69 minutes.

READ for Luton after 72 minutes.

gathering pace off the muddy pitch, was going to be the answer and Harber showed he appreciated it with a long centre from which Hampton was harassed by Whittaker into conceding a corner.

A foul by Reid on the tall Still gave the County a free kick midway in the Town half and it led to the county equalising after eight minutes through SHIELDS.

Hampton took the kick, smacked it along the ground and Sheridan got a foot to it to edge it still further forward. As it happened, the ball ended in an open space with Tinsley left with a little too much ground to make up before Shiels was on to it to ram it into the net.

Another free kick to the County was dangerous. Tinsley, slithering in the mud, was only able to help the ball across to the right where Bates met it and by fine judgment the goalkeeper was back in position to catch the well-placed shot.

The Town attacked hard and with the referee exercising the advantage rule after Harber had been brought down, O'Rourke shot across the face of the goal.

Butler was brought into action by headers from Read and O'Rourke, the latter following more bright play of French.

With 16 minutes gone, the County paid the penalty for their obstructive tactics in defence when a free kick was awarded against them for a foul on French. Tony READ, who is something of an expert in this respect, took the kick—but must have been surprised at the ease with which his low drive went through the defensive wall

and beat Butler, to regain the lead for the Town.

HARBER PROMINENT

The Town were the more dangerous with Harber, despite some rough usage, prominent, and two corners came in quick succession.

Still was spoken to by the referee after getting at cross purposes with Thompson.

Butler cut out at the near post a cross by French, and then Hampton handled when beaten by the bounce of the ball, with O'Rourke waiting behind him.

GOOD COVERING BY REID

There was a narrow escape for the Town when Shiels, from



Ray Whittaker whose shot was deflected in to give the Town an early lead.

the right wing, made an awkward centre which Tinsley did not reach properly, but Reid, with a shrewd sense of covering, had dropped back to clear, some two or three yards from the goal line.

The County could never be counted out of this game. Flower came into the picture with a long run, at the end of which Edwards, under pressure, gave away a corner, from which Flower shot well wide.

A brilliant piece of play by French could have brought a decisive blow, but his final pass to Harber went just too fast and Butler was able to collect.

When the County came back after a good spell by the Town, in which their approach work was better than their finishing, a good save by Tinsley kept the lead intact when Bates received a second chance after Woods had just failed to get the ball clear.

Twice in quick succession Bircumshaw was penalised for

TEAMS

LUTON TOWN: Tinsley; Thomson, Edwards; Reid; Woods, Moore; Harber; Read, O'Rourke, French, Whittaker. Substitute: Gibson.

NOTTS COUNTY: Butler; Hampton, Bircumshaw; Coates; Gibson, Sheridan; Bates, Moulden, Shiels, Still, Flower. Substitute, Agnew.

Referee: Mr. G. W. T. Davis, Romford.

fouls on Harber, but Town pressure was not so sustained as earlier, and Butler's only task was to cut out a centre from the left by O'Rourke.

MIX-UP IN TOWN GOALMOUTH

There followed a mix-up in front of the Town goal in which Edwards, unwisely, chose to lob the ball back to Tinsley. Moulden intercepted, but with the goalkeeper harassing him he could only stab the ball wide.

Towards half-time there was some County pressure and also some evidence that the Town had lost some of their earlier grip.

Then a typical O'ROURKE effort after 43 minutes made the Town's position more comfortable.

Whittaker picked up the ball on the left and pushed it through to O'Rourke who, from an almost impossible angle, beat Hampton and closed in to leave Butler stranded with a delightfully placed shot.

In the next minute the Town had a free kick, and Edwards from long range dropped the ball inches too high. Half-time.

LUTON TOWN 3
NOTTS COUNTY 1

Conditions were steadily becoming worse, water was now beginning to stand on the surfaces in places.

After a tardy start to the second half, Whittaker woke things up with a long diagonal centre that Gibson headed behind for safety as Harber closed in.

There was a corner for the County when Still kicked the ball against Thomson, but Reid, covering splendidly, was on hand to head clear.

A sudden urge by the Town saw Whittaker boring strongly



Tony Read who made sure of the points for Luton with a brilliant hat-trick.

through the middle, only to be held up for a free kick for handling.

After this, came quite the most brilliant piece of work in the match when French suddenly picked up a ball in midfield, left two opponents scrambling in the mud and looked a certain scorer until Butler, some way out of his goal, made an excellent save.

FRENCH SHOT AT GOALKEEPER

From a corner, French, who was leaving his mark on the game, met the ball first time, right-footed, and it was fortunate for the County that the drive flew straight at Butler.

Then Woods got into the act with some clever football in midfield, to keep the Town on to the attack. This was followed briskly by a County break in which Tinsley made a wonder save from Still by pulling the ball down from above his head, some way out of goal.

Panic showed in the County defence when Hampton harassed by Read, put the ball behind from the corner and O'Rourke, who gets up so well to the high ball, got a glancing touch which took the ball wide.

GOOD SAVE BY TINSLEY

The County certainly were still in with a chance and Tinsley again saved well, this time from Moulden who had been let in when Edwards slipped in the mud. Reid, taking aim from fully 35 yards, saw the ball go just over the top.

Both defences were being tested in turn, and a too-strong back pass by Edwards beat Tinsley. County gained a corner, but it proved harmless.

Edwards nearly passed back even more tragically in the next minute, for Tinsley had to throw himself to his right to make a one-handed save, and indeed did well to do so.

HARBER TRIES TO BREAK THROUGH

Harber made another determined effort to break through the County's defence from Thomson's pass, but was tackled in the act of shooting and had to be content with a corner.

Then, after 69 minutes, the

Town struck again in most timely fashion through READ. It was the finish of a splendid movement begun by French and carried on by O'Rourke. Read had just enough time to pick his spot, which he did with deadly accuracy.

Three minutes later READ completed a brilliant hat-trick, his first for the Town, when he came in to meet squarely with his head a well placed corner by Whittaker. As he made connection Read went full length and the ball rocketed into the back of the net.

Now the County were in trouble, with the confident Town piling on the pressure. Harber nearly wormed his way through for another goal, and the County escaped only at the expense of another corner.

Thomson was booked by the referee, apparently for saying something after being penalised for a foul on Still.

Conditions now were really bad, with the pitch having churned up into something resembling a morass—and there was still no let up in the rain.

County kept pegging away, but much of their enthusiasm had been blunted by those two hammer blows by Read, and their attacks were not carrying much threat.

Whittaker hit the outside of the near post after further fine distribution by French.

Hopes of another Town goal three minutes from the end were shattered when, after Read had beaten Butler, Bircumshaw stopped the ball on the line. Result:

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