

WHAT THE OTHER CRITICS SAID

O'ROURKE AGAIN THE MATCH-WINNER

Ended the stranglehold of Hartlepoons' defence

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 2, HARTLEPOOLS UNITED 1

WHEN a team sets out to prevent another from scoring, with scant attention to their own attacking needs, then the result is likely to become boredom.

Add to that, a constant shrilling of the whistle by the referee, as happened in the first half, sometimes needlessly, and it all adds up to stalemate which was what the first half in the Town's home match with Hartlepoons produced.

In fact, at half-time, there was a distinct query about whether the Town could break down the blanket defence thrown down by Hartlepoons, and it was obvious that something out of the ordinary had to be done to achieve it.

Man for the occasion was O'ROURKE who, either by design or accident, found himself in an open space some 35 yards from goal.

Quickly, he gained control, went on against the odds and finished by scoring perhaps the most brilliant individual goal we have seen from him in a total that now reaches to 52.

To take him to that tally, he got up high to flick with his head into the net, well out of the reach of Green, a well-placed free kick by Whittaker, and that seemed to open the floodgates for the Town.

So it should, because they had ample chances afterwards but were guilty of inaccuracy in finishing, even though Whittaker shot against the foot of a post, and French forced Green to make two great saves.

TENTERHOOKS IN LATE STAGES

So dominant were the Town throughout that any other result but victory to them was unthinkable. Yet they spent the last quarter of an hour on tenterhooks after Hartlepoons had mounted one of their rare attacks, and THOMPSON beat the offside trap because Riddick did not come out quickly enough after Woods had moved forward.

There is no doubt about the value of a well-laid offside trap, on which I have noticed that the Town are placing increasing reliance, but it does call for split-second judgment by the whole of the defence and, on this occasion, there was a slip-up.

Once or twice Hartlepoons came close to an equaliser which would have been a travesty of justice because the Town were so clearly the better footballing team.

Had they made the best use of their chances, they could have given their goal average a most necessary boost, but the heavy going did not help them, and there were weaknesses at inside-forward.

There Read could well have helped himself to a hat-trick had he really been on target, and Rioch found the close attentions of Ashworth too much for him.

Even so, he might have had a couple of goals had not O'Rourke, in his eagerness

tried to make certain but only succeeded in diverting the ball over.

On another occasion, Rioch flashed the ball into the back of the net, only to find that the referee's whistle had gone seconds previously for a foul on him and to rob him of his just deserts.

It needed an opportunist of the class of O'Rourke to open up this game and he is the man to whom the Town owe the biggest debt for two precious points.

Just why more use was not made of the wingers, French, in particular, remains a mystery. Obviously, they were operating on the best going available and yet, experienced players like Read kept pushing the ball down the morass in the middle.

Whenever he secured the ball which was all too infrequently, French showed what a danger he could be and Whittaker was always menacing when he had the chance.

Comparatively speaking, this was an easy day for the defence which was almost able to stroll through, with Woods easily taming Phythian and Moore taking on a dominating role in midfield.

Jardine was right back to his best, but Riddick tended to be a little too casual in his approach and also was more adventurous than the circumstances permitted.

For Tinsley, it was very nearly a day off because he was seldom brought into violent action.

LUTON TOWN: Tinsley; Riddick, Jardine; Reid, Woods, Moore; French, Read, O'Rourke, Rioch, Whittaker.

HARTLEPOOLS UNITED: Green; Grant, Drysdale; Ashworth, Gill, Storton; Wright, Thompson, Phythian, Fogarty, Bradley.

Referee: R. V. Spittle, Caister-on-sea. Attendance: 6,131.

"A foul every two minutes tells its own story of this niggling encounter in which Luton scraped two valuable points in their promotion bid. There were 47 hold-ups for infringements, 35 in the first half. Most remarkable was that neither trainer had to visit the field.

"Referee Rex Spittle must shoulder much of the blame. He should have made more use of the advantage rule and been much firmer." — "The People"

"Luton, locked out by a tight defence, broke the stalemate in the 49th minute with a brilliant solo goal from John O'Rourke.

"He set off on a 35-yard run before driving past goalkeeper Green—the one bright spot in a game of little distinction. Seven minutes later O'Rourke added a second." — "Sunday Mirror"

"Although they keep collecting points to further their promotion ambitions, Luton may live to rue the heavy weather they made of beating teams from the lower reaches of the table. Luton should have been able to polish their goal average which is not very healthy, but failed to do so in this scrappy match.

"Hartlepoons approached the game with the apparent intention of gaining a point by strictly defensive measures. Often they had seven men helping goalkeeper Green back in the penalty area." — "Sunday Express"

"At half-time it seemed unlikely that Luton would ever pierce the Hartlepoons' defensive wall which allied to the heavy conditions, kept their lively forwards at bay.

"Even the mercurial O'Rourke became bogged down in his efforts to break through, but helped the opposition when he intervened with the head to deflect a header by Rioch that was bound for the back of the net.

"What with the spoiling tactics of the visitors and constant interruption of play by the referee's whistle, the first half was much of a shambles." — "Sunday Telegraph"