

TOWN FIGHT DOUR BATTLE WITH THE LEAGUE LEADERS

Darlington nose ahead early in second half

By CHILTERN

DARLINGTON 1, LUTON TOWN 0

UNBEATEN in their last nine games, which have yielded them 14 points, Luton Town went to Darlington this afternoon undeterred by the fact they were taking on the Fourth Division leaders. Fighting a dour, defensive battle, they were still on terms at the interval.

Darlington nosed ahead with a goal headed by centre-forward Cummings three minutes after the interval, but were unable to build up a commanding

Whittaker there was still something of a utility look about the Town team. With O'Rourke still absent, Rivers continued as an emergency centre-forward, and with John Reid needed for inside-left, Alan Slough was again at right-half, where he did so well at Barrow on Monday.

On the other hand, Darlington, who shot to the top of the table by their win at Colchester, were fielding the same full-strength team for a tenth consecutive time.

Blazing bright sunshine had turned this bare-looking pitch dust heap, and made the memory of the waterlogged grounds that were with us until a few days ago, seem a remote memory.

MANY IN SHIRT SLEEVES

There was tremendous interest in this match locally, because, obviously, Darlington had installed themselves as favourites for the top prize in the Fourth Division. I estimate that about 12,000, many in shirt sleeves, saw the start.

The crowd included quite a smattering of Luton fans, despite the long journey, which I am reliably informed is 219 miles by road.

For the second time this week the Town had to change colours because of a clash, and they wore their red shirts and white shorts.

They lost the toss without suffering much disadvantage, because there was no breeze to speak of.

A bad clearance kick by Tinsley which went straight to McGeachie put Darlington on to the attack, but the ball was pushed back to the goalkeeper, who made no mistake in covering his lines.

Darlington were dangerous when Hutchinson picked up a cross from O'Neill, but took too long in which to get the lively ball under control so that he was bundled off it by Edwards. Moor completed the clearance with a pass to Whittaker, who was brought down by Peverell. The free kick was the means of the Town getting into the picture for the first time, but without much flourish, because the Darlington defence covered up, despite an attempt by

TEAMS

DARLINGTON: Moor; Peverell, Keeble; Yeoman, Jacques, Ratcliffe; McGeachie, Hutchinson, Cummings, Sproates, O'Neill. Substitute: Connon.

LUTON TOWN: Tinsley; Thomson, Edwards; Slough, Woods, Moore; French, Riddick, Rivers, Reid, Whittaker. Substitute: Read.

Referee: K. Dagnall, of Bolton.

Edwards to force a way through.

With the lively ball moving about freely, play was fast and characterised by some determined tackling by both teams.

In an endeavour to make progress, the Town forwards were switching about, with Riddick spending quite a lot of time in the middle.

A foul by Reid on Yeoman brought Darlington a free-kick, which was plugged well into the penalty area by Keeble, but the dependable Woods was on hand, and the threat was cut off in its infancy.

REID BLAZES IN A SHOT

Town's first direct shot came from Reid, who blazed away first time at a pass from Whittaker, and Moor had some difficulty in pushing out a ball that bounced awkwardly in front of him.

At the other end a mistake by Moore almost let in O'Neill for a great chance, but Thomson covered up quickly and just got a foot to the ball. From this, the Town gained a corner which was unproductive, and the end-to-end pattern of play persisted.

A promising Town raid, sparked off by French and Riddick, went to waste because Rivers tried to shoot from too far out. He did not contact properly, and the ball rolled gently wide.

Then, Slough, running on to a cross pass by Riddick, tried from 25 yards, but was yards too high and sent the ball on to the adjoining cricket ground.

There was a word from the referee for Thomson for pulling down Ratcliffe six or seven yards outside the

penalty area, and Darlington were given a free-kick which Moore headed away.

Without having been able to cause Tinsley undue concern, Darlington perhaps had had the edge slightly in the first quarter of an hour. One reason for this was that too many of the passes being made by the Town forwards were being intercepted.

Then, Reid tried his luck from nearly 30 yards, and a very worthy effort it was, because Moor might have been in dire trouble if the ball, which was moving away from him all the time, had been a foot lower.

Tinsley was shaken up when Cummings crashed into him as he rose to cut off a corner by McGeachie, and there was a slight hold up while he was attended to.

Some decisive work by Rivers beat two opponents in tackles to put the Town on at attack, but this time Reid found no-one unmarked. He was forced to shoot, and the ball cannoned kindly off Jacques.

A CLOSE CALL FOR THE TOWN

Naturally enough, there was a great deal of tension in the play, accentuated by the partisanship of the crowd.

Tinsley had to pull down a centre by O'Neill, and then was able to watch another by the same player go harmlessly over.

Trying to find Tinsley, Edwards only succeeded in heading behind for a corner when O'Neill centred again, and McGeachie's kick caused trouble. The ball crossed then recrossed dangerously in front of the Town goal. Eventually, Moor was able to hook it clear, but it had been a close thing. For a time, Darlington continued the heavy pressure.

However, the Town got over this difficult period, thanks in the main to the coolness of Woods, and they set up an attack on their own account. Their tendency to hold on to the ball too long, however, was availing them little against the close covering home defence.

Peverell brought down Whittaker again as the winger tried to find a way down the middle, but the Town were still finding difficulty in reaching reasonable shooting range.

Darlington were playing 4-2-4 formation very effectively, giving them a solid last

line at the edge of the penalty area.

Good play on the Town's right flank brought a centre by French which Jacques headed for a corner in the face of a challenge by Riddick, but Whittaker spoilt the effect by putting the ball behind.

Cummings appeared to have missed a chance of a lifetime when he spobned the ball over the Town goal from close in after strong work by Hutchinson, but his conscience was reprieved, because the whistle had gone for offside.

Rivers was being used almost completely in a defensive role now, which left Riddick as the striker down the middle. Whittaker seemed to have been allotted a roving commission.

The Darlington attack was

How the goals came

CUMMINGS for Darlington after 48 minutes.

still looking the more cohesive, but Town's defence was doing a great job of marking and covering, so that Tinsley's worries were comparatively few.

A clever triangular movement by Riddick, Reid and Whittaker looked promising until Riddick got himself into an offside position.

As half-time neared, Darlington's pressure became more persistent, and the Town were forced back on to the defensive. The home team were not impressive in front of goal, however, and between them McGeachie and Cummings missed an acceptable centre from O'Neill.

Then, it was the Town's turn on attack, with Whittaker

making two centres, the second was pulled down by Moor, and his clearance took Darlington again to the other end, where Thomson stepped in to save the situation.

Two minutes from half-time Riddick headed a centre by Reid into Moor's hands, but the whistle went for offside. Half-time:

DARLINGTON 0
LUTON TOWN 0

Rivers was still withdrawn into a deep defensive position, and first incident of the second half came when Whittaker cut in before and passed to Riddick, who got in his shot but was penalised for fouling Peverell.

With three minutes of the second half gone, the vital first goal fell to Darlington when CUMMINGS headed wide of Tinsley, the centre coming from McGeachie.

The initial danger had come from a long goalkick which was only partly cleared, and for once in a way the Town defence was caught a little off balance, so that in the sudden rush the centre-forward was able to connect at almost point-blank range.

Darlington, with the crowd well behind them, came again and Tinsley had the utmost difficulty in dealing with another centre from McGeachie in the face of a challenge by Cummings.

NOT ENOUGH THRUST IN ATTACK

Striving hard to get back on terms, the Town raided through Riddick and Whittaker, but they had not the thrust in front of goal to cause Moor much anxiety.

Rivers had now come up to an orthodox centre-forward position, and a centre by Whittaker went too high for him, though French, closing in from the wing, nearly squeezed it in at the foot of the post.

There was a determined bid by Whittaker to break through but he found his stride broken and the moment slipped by.

A mistake by Peverell let in Riddick and enabled Town to build up pressure. A corner which was well placed by Whittaker, Reid met with his

head to send the ball just wide.

It was still hard fought, tense sort of stuff, reflected in the over-anxiety both teams were feeling.

There was still not sufficient thrust: from the Town, Moore tried to put matters right by coming into the attack to round off a movement by Reid, Whittaker and Riddick, but only succeeded in hooking the ball into the hands of Moor.

When Darlington came back O'Neill shot straight at Tinsley after McGeachie had beaten Edwards.

There was a free kick to the Town after Cummings had pushed Woods in the back. His kick did not carry so accurately as usual, and Darlington were put in no difficulty. In fact, they were still presenting a solid defensive line and Town were finding it hard to get through.

More shooting was coming from Darlington, and Tinsley was tested by McGeachie, who almost immediately afterwards drove over the goal from just inside the penalty area.

There was a corner to Darlington when Woods headed behind a long, oblique centre from Yeoman, and then Thomson conceded another, although I thought he could have left the ball to Tinsley. This was only half cleared and Keeble made an excellent effort to put Darlington further ahead with a long, low drive that threaded its way through a crowd of players and just missed a post.

WILD CLEARANCE BY DARLINGTON

An unnecessarily wild clearance by Jacques, induced some fist waving by his captain, Yeoman, who obviously was not going to have anything that smacked of panic stations. All that resulted, however, was a gentle, right footed centre by Whittaker which dropped into the hands of Moor.

Then, there was a hold up while French had attention to an injury to his left leg, just above the knee it seemed, but he recovered quickly.

In the main, Darlington were playing cool and safe in