

RIOCH SETS TOWN ON VICTORY PATH WITH QUICK GOAL

Whittaker clinches it with penalty goal

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 2, STOCKPORT COUNTY 0

LUTON TOWN'S promotion prospects prospered this afternoon with the expected victory over Stockport County. Bruce Rioch, back in the side after injury, set the pattern with a goal after only six minutes, and Ray Whittaker clinched the issue from the penalty spot after O'Rourke had been brought down.

Bad luck for the Town was that left-back Freddie Jardine, making his first appearance since Easter, was injured again and was carried off on a stretcher with a badly sprained ankle.

Happily for Town, their injury situation, which has been a handicap these last few weeks, had cleared up sufficiently to enable them to field a full-strength side.

This meant that John O'Rourke, after being out for three matches, was back in the middle, and Rioch, whose absence has lasted for nine weeks, came in on O'Rourke's left after two successful trials in the Reserves.

To complete a more pleasing situation, Jardine was able to return at left-back.

TEAMS

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

STOCKPORT C.: Fleet; Collins, Tillotson; Parry, Clarke, Goodwin; Allchurch, Haydock, White, Young, Price. Substitute: Shawcross.

Referee: Mr. P. R. Walters, Bridgwater.

A surprise was Manager George Martin's decision to put Tony Read in goal for the first time in a senior game this season.

Read, of course, was signed as a goalkeeper, but all his previous league service for the Town has been in the forward line.

Because of an injury to Sykes, Stockport were forced to make three late alterations, two of them positional.

To fill the vacancy at centre-half, Clarke switched from left-half, where Goodwin chosen originally for inside-right, took over, and his replacement was Haydock.

Like the Town, Stockport have been bothered by injuries, and, in fact, this was the first time in nine weeks that their two most experienced forwards, Allchurch and White, had played together.

There was a bigish crowd to see the Town make a rousing start in which Rioch nearly slipped through to score in the

first minute from a through pass with which he failed only fractionally to connect.

Then, O'Rourke also just failed to make contact racing headlong at the goal from a centre by French.

A good chance went astray through hurried shooting by O'Rourke after Reid had laid on an opening and Fleet was badly positioned.

A GREAT GOAL BY RIOCH

Then, with six minutes gone, the Town gained the goal they had been promising all along, with RIOCH celebrating his return in fitting fashion.

He well deserved to score, because he laid on the opening in the first instance for O'Rourke, who produced a terrific first-time drive that Fleet somehow saved but could only put out to Rioch. It was not an easy ball to control, but the inside-left did so cleverly and made no mistake about placing it just inside a post.

Despite the rain there has been recently, the surface of the pitch was surprisingly firm, and the crowd of about 10,000 saw the Town continue their tearaway start. Two or three times the ball crossed the Stockport goal dangerously, and the visitors' defence was looking distinctly troubled under pressure.

With a quarter of an hour gone, the Town suffered the sort of blow to which they have become accustomed, when one of their number received a serious-looking injury.

This time it was Jardine, who was only just making his comeback after missing four matches with a pulled groin muscle. The accident—and such it was—occurred when Jardine made an ambitious run deep into the Stockport half, pursuing a long pass by Rioch.

It was always touch and go whether he would reach it, and Collins came across to challenge. The ball went out of play, both players went down, and Jardine stayed down.

There were hurried calls for a stretcher, and a signal for

How the goals came

RIOCH for Luton after 6 minutes.

WHITTAKER for Luton after 61 mins.

the Town's substitute, Alan Slough, fortunately a full-back in his own right, to come on.

There was quite a hold-up before play could be resumed, and it had been on for some little time before the sorrowful procession began, bringing Jardine from the Bobbers' stand side of the ground on a stretcher.

The first opportunity that Tony Read had of showing his mettle in his new-found position came when he raced out of goal to beat Haydock to a long, bouncing ball.

There was applause for Jardine as he was carried along the running track in front of the main stand, looking pale and in pain.

READ SAVES BRILLIANTLY

For the first time, Stockport showed up as an attacking force, and they might so easily have drawn level. First, an amazing effort by Allchurch saw the ball bounce off his knee and rebound off the far post with Read beaten. It bounced about for a little while and before Price eventually got in a terrific drive Read brought down the house by saving spectacularly, and again he made a brilliant clearance, one-handed, from the corner by Allchurch.

Still the dangerous Stockport pressure persisted, and Read was absolutely helpless to do anything about a shot by Young that hit the top of the bar and went over. It had been an unexpected turn of events, because Stockport, looking so lethargic at the start, had suddenly found sparkle.

Town's early sparkle had disappeared, and this could not fairly be traceable to the mishap to Jardine.

Twice, when they promised to break away, O'Rourke was caught offside, and, generally speaking, Stockport defence, so harassed at the start, was now having much more time in which to make clearances.

Stockport were certainly showing more zest for the game now, and were having rather the better of matters without really being able to bring Read into the sort of activity in which he had distinguished himself earlier.

From what looked like being a spanking game, with the Town threatening to improve their goal average substantially, it had now become a rather scrappy affair.

Town promised better things towards half-time, only to be held up again by offside as Reid closed in to make a shot that struck Fleet in the face.

Then, Fleet was brought into action when Moore picked up the sort of loose ball in midfield which he has turned into goals this season. He took it in his stride and let go a full-blooded drive. It was deflected by a defender, and French, closing in, all but managed to work it past Fleet, who was the only Stockport man between him and goal. Somehow or other, however, the goalkeeper, by use of all the advantages open to him, managed to scramble it to safety.

Stockport were now back on defence, and a long free-kick by Woods was just too high for O'Rourke. It got him on top of the head, and spooned up into the air, so that Fleet was able to pull it down without trouble.

TOWN REGAIN THEIR RHYTHM

There were signs now that Town were regaining their earlier rhythm, and a long run by Whittaker followed by a centre, was headed away by



RAY WHITTAKER scored Town's second goal, from the penalty spot after 61 minutes.

Clarke in the nick of time. Otherwise, Rioch, boring down on the goal, would have been a certain scorer.

With the pressure continuing, French made a pile-driver of a shot that struck Tillotson squarely between the eyes and laid him out. He came round quickly, which was as well for Stockport, because the Town had things going their way again.

A sudden break by Stock

BRUCE RIOCH celebrated his return to the Town side with a great goal after only six minutes.

port was staved off by Moore, and O'Rourke was sent off on a solo run which was stopped. Half-time:

LUTON TOWN 1
STOCKPORT 0

Jardine, it was said at half-time, has a severely sprained left ankle, and, with only just over a fortnight left of the season, it seems unlikely that he will be able to play any part in the final drive for promotion.

The second half began as had the first, with the Town pressing hotly. O'Rourke was a little unlucky not to add to the Town's too-slender lead with a header from French's centre which he directed well away from Fleet, but the ball had not quite sufficient pace to beat the goalkeeper's despairing dive.

TOWN NEARLY SCORE AGAIN

Stockport, suspect though they were in defence, could not be discounted when their attack was on the move, and Read saved well from Haydock and then rightly played safe by pushing over a surprise long shot by Tillotson.

In fact, the Town badly needed the boost of another goal, and it might have come from Rioch but for a quick reaction by Fleet, who threw himself at the inside-left's feet to concede a corner which the goalkeeper punched away.

Then came a curious incident at the other end when Read, racing well out of his penalty area to cut off a long through pass, handled and, of course, was penalised for doing so. Not that it was serious because he himself handled Goodwin's free kick capably and legitimately this time.

Next stoppage was for attention to Price, who clashed with Moore inside the Town penalty area. Town were given a free-kick and Moore plugged it to Reid deep in the inside-left position. Reid made a dangerous centre, and Fleet, throwing himself at the ball, just managed to hang on as O'Rourke came racing up to finish in the back of the net.

PENALTY GOAL FOR TOWN

Then the Town began a more persistent spell of pressure during which Whittaker shot straight at Fleet.

O'Rourke, trying to thread a way through to goal was unmistakably pulled down

inside the penalty area as Haydock and Clarke barred his way. In the end, I think it was Clarke who did the tripping. The referee pointed to the penalty spot, and WHITTAKER made no mistake with a low shot wide of Fleet's right hand, to put the Town two goals up after 61 minutes.

O'Rourke was getting some rough usage at this stage, and the crowd was angered when the referee took no action when the centre-forward was again brought down, this time by Goodwin, but there was a prompt response from him when Slough made a double-footed tackle on Allchurch.

SPIRITED REPLY BY STOCKPORT

There was a spirited response from Stockport following a run by Price, and Young flicked the ball with his foot much too close to the far post for comfort, especially as Read was well beaten.

We had not seen a great deal of Riddick because of his defensive role, keeping an eye on Young, who was virtually a second centre-forward. Suddenly, however, he came into the picture as an attacker with a pass to French who responded by laying on the sort of chance that O'Rourke rarely misses. Nor did he do so this time, but unfortunately the linesman's flag was up for offside before the ball began its journey into the back of the net.

Twice after this Read was in action, once catching a high lob from Young and then punching out. The punch also landed on the side of Wood's head, and made him shake it somewhat ruefully.

At this stage, Stockport were moving the ball about freely and accurately in attack, but relief came to Town with a long clearance by Rioch. There followed a rare old battle for possession in the middle between O'Rourke and the burly Clarke, who won in the end, although I rather think pushing helped him to do so.

Again the Town had a goal disallowed for offside, Moore being the unlucky one this

time, but the decision was predictable.

IT IS ALL LUTON NOW

There was heavy Town pressure now, and Clarke all but headed into his own net from French, who then had a shot pushed over by Fleet, who had come right out of his goal to follow a corner by Whittaker and missed it.

It was all Luton at this stage, with Town going all out for more goals. One nearly came when Riddick headed only just wide from a corner by French.

PLENTY OF EFFORT BY STOCKPORT

The game was still hard, with Stockport giving plenty of effort, and there was a stoppage while O'Rourke had attention to his right leg. At first, this looked a little



ominous in view of future commitments, but happily he made a speedy recovery.

There was applause for a long, ambitious run by Price that eventually fizzled out.

Moore headed away a long free kick and when Young returned the ball into the goalmouth, Read played safe by pushing it for a corner kick, which Thomson booted away in the firmest possible style.

Only two minutes were left now, and the ball was mainly in midfield, though Read had a further chance to show his mettle when he came well out to pull down stylishly a long lob by Tillotson.

Then, he threw himself full-length on the edge of the six-yard line to save from Goodwin. Result:

LUTON TOWN 2
STOCKPORT 0