

NEVER SETTLED IN AT HALIFAX

Late goals made it look worse

By CHILTERN

HALIFAX TOWN 3, LUTON TOWN 0

WE have seen it all before. A hard, bumpy ground, a light ball bouncing all over the place and determined opposition willing to go in to meet the ball and, in addition, give it plenty of thump.

Yes, that is just about what happened at The Shay, Halifax, on Monday evening when a meagre 2,877 paid only £297 to see what might, or might not be, the last Football League match ever on this ground.

Add to the set of conditions itemised in the first paragraph, the fact that the Town had one of their worse days, with a display in which they were completely unrecognisable from the slick outfit that humiliated Port Vale two days earlier, and the sombre picture becomes clear.

Not that I feel that the result does them full justice because two of the three goals came in the last 10 minutes to over-emphasise the superiority of Halifax whom, let us face it, were the more effective team on the day, but were flattered rather by the margin in their favour.

On the alibi side, the only one I could find for the Town, and it was a not inconsiderable one, was that Whittaker limped off the field after only half-an-hour with one of those pulled thigh muscles that plague him from time to time, and although Edwards came on as a brave enough substitute, even his best friends would not describe him as much of a hand as an outside-left.

HAD NOT SHOWN MUCH BALANCE

Naturally enough, that upset the balance of a forward line that had not shown much in that connection anyway, and right through the piece there was little sign that the front line would settle down as a cohesive effective unit.

Obviously the hope was—and was also badly feared by the home team—that the Town would score in the first quarter of an hour and so settle down to a constructive display, but, frankly, they never promised to do so.

With the ball playing all sorts of tricks, the Town badly needed someone to slow down the game in midfield and direct operations, but no-one seemed to be able to cope.

Riddick tried to do so, but his distribution was faulty, and I thought that the one real piece of bad luck they had was when Westlake, playing in an exaggerated defensive role, appeared to punch the ball out of the penalty area.

O'Rourke, sadly lacking in support, was not much too

high with an overhead kick, but generally the Town gave the home defence little trouble, and matters became worse when Whittaker left.

As Halifax began to realise that they had not so much to fear as might have been the case, they gained confidence and, towards the interval, began to press. After Read had saved from McMillan and Fidler, Edwards hooked a shot from McMillan off the line, with Read stranded.

So half-time arrived with the score-sheet blank, a state of affairs for which I would have been glad to settle at the end of the next 45 minutes, but it was not to be.

The second half began with a couple of Town casualties, with Edwards getting a knock in the thigh from Russell and Thomson a kick on the nose from the tall Atkins.

If ever there were a case of dangerous play, even taking into account the great height of the inside-left, then I have never seen it, but with Thomson bleeding profusely and the front of his white shirt blurred with blood, the referee persisted in his decision to give Halifax a corner.

EDWARDS BOOKED

Fortunately, Read caught this, and the next incident was the booking of Edwards

for what looked to be a mild enough defence.

As is usual when they are in the north and something of a rough and tumble develops, it is always the Town who receive the blame from the northern correspondents, and I certainly would not agree with one report that said that they lost their heads after WESTLAKE headed Halifax into the lead after 65 minutes following a free-kick.

That spurred on Halifax, who persisted in banging the ball high into the Town penalty area which produced all sorts of difficulties for the defence.

Just once from a corner by French which a defender hooked over, did the Town look as if they would equalise, but then Halifax came again; Rioch, trying to clear, hooked the ball straight to McMILLAN, and he gratefully slammed an unstoppable shot past Read.

That was nine minutes from the end, and the game was in its dying seconds when in a scramble LEE somehow forced the ball past Read following a cross from the left.

POOR REWARD FOR DEFENCE

To say that it was a disappointing Town display is an under-statement. There was little construction from inside-forwards, O'Rourke was effectively blotted out, and much the same applied to French, except from some rare spasms.

To concede three goals was a poor reward for the fight put up by the defence, in which Woods was again most forceful and bravely aided and abetted by Thomson, who played on in the face of something of a handicap, and Slough.

HALIFAX T.—White; Russell, Clarke; Smith, Pickering, Lee; McMillan, Westlake, Wooler, Atkins, Fidler. Substitute: Balmer.

LUTON TOWN.—Read; Thomson, Slough; Riddick, Woods, Moore; French, Reid, O'Rourke, Rioch, Whittaker (Edwards).

Referee.—J. S. Pickles, Stockport.