

SHOCK START THE END FOR TOWN

No recovery after "gifting" an early goal

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 2, NOTTS COUNTY 5

YET another dire blow, not only to the Town's prestige, but to the hopes that they could put their most moderate start behind them and make something really worthwhile of this season, hit them on Saturday when they faced up to a vastly more experienced County side.

However, even the fact that the Town are sadly lacking an old head to direct matters, could have been overcome by youthful skill, but for a terrible start of the sort from which no team could really be expected to recover.

In the first quarter of an hour, the County scored three times against a defence that seemed to have come apart at the seams, and virtually assured themselves of their first away win of the season.

Root cause of the trouble was an appalling lack of understanding in defence which led to the County being presented with the vital first goal on a plate after only four minutes.

A free kick against Thomson was placed into the goal-mouth by UPTON, certainly with no scoring intent, but nobody moved towards clearing the ball, possibly because of differing shouted instructions.

Whatever the cause, the effect was complete enough, because to their mortification, the Town saw the ball bounce off the inside of a post and trickle into the net when at least two players, including Read, could have cleared with ease.

EARLY GOAL CAST A BLIGHT

Not surprisingly, perhaps, that untoward happening cast a blight over the whole scene and the Town were never a confident outfit afterwards. By the time the game was a quarter of an hour old, **HARKIN** had scored twice and the expectation was of further goals by the County, so much at sixes and sevens was the Town's rearguard.

In the event, the lead was not increased until the 35th minute, and then UPTON was allowed to make far too much ground before letting fly from 25 yards and the ball eluded the grasping hands of Read to go in just under the bar.

Once or twice, the Town forwards moved with some show of authority which prompted the thought that they might have been seen in a more consistent light, had there been a more tenable foundation to their task.

PLEAT BROUGHT FIRST HOPE

One of these raids brought them their first success four minutes from half-time when French made a short centre and PLEAT drove it firmly first-time past Smith (G).

With Rioch a limping passenger at outside-left at the start of the second half, the Town's problems were accentuated, but they were given an outside chance of recovery in the 66th minute when THEAR scored an opportunist goal from Rioch's pass, with the defence awaiting an off-side decision.

Unfortunately, that did not prove to be the springboard from which a recovery could be mounted and the County absorbed that particular shock, to gain the upper hand again.

Their fifth goal came ten minutes from the end through GIBSON from the penalty spot after Riddick had committed a blatant and completely unnecessary handling offence.

MOORE WAS INJURED, TOO

Altogether, it was a most unfortunate day for the Town who lost Moore after 25 minutes with an eye injury, but his replacement, Slough, probably appalled at the mistakes that had caused the dire situation, brought a forthright approach to his play which was refreshing.

Once again, the point must be raised of whether Riddick is too much of a luxury at centre-half and whether a less accomplished footballer, but a more rugged type, would not do a more effective job there.

While it must be conceded

that this was not the happiest of occasions on which to make a debut, it must also be remarked that Conboy looked a little out of his element and, once again, there was the lack of authority in midfield which is proving costly.

Thomson and Jardine could justly point to having been over-run at times, but the latter was not at his best and the responsibility seemed to begin to lie heavily on Thomson in the second half.

PROMISE OF THIS WING PAIRING

Forward, the right-wing pairing of French and Pleat held out not a little promise for the future, but the other flank was disjointed by the injury to Rioch which occurred in the early stages, and Whittaker spent quite a lot of his time trying to get into things at inside-forward.

There is no doubt that Thear, when the opportunities are created, does not miss many, but only one came his way on this occasion and the rest of the time for him must have been merely frustration.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Thomson, Jardine; Conboy, Riddick, Moore (Slough); French, Pleat, Thear, Rioch, Whittaker.

NOTTS COUNTY: Smith (G); Chalmers, Hampton; Edwards, Gibson, Upton; Bowers, Smith (J), Harkin, Beresford, Clarke. Substitute: Thompson.

Referee: C. Thomas,
Treorchy. Attendance: 5,743.