

TOWN NEED MORE POWER IN ATTACK

STOCKPORT 1, LUTON TOWN 0

TO BE complacent about the Town's performance at Stockport last night would be easy enough. After all, there is no disgrace in losing to the leaders and promotion favourites by the only goal.

However, after the match, Town officials were not inclined to think that way, and frankly they were disappointed that Town had not been able to improve their poor away record.

The reason, of course, is not hard to find. Away from Kenilworth Road, the attack is functioning at the moment on two few cylinders to look a potent force.

Admittedly, the main object at Stockport was to try to hold on to a point, and Town came close to it.

Tactics were based on tight defence—and there is nothing wrong with that in an away match, if it is accompanied by quick break out into attack.

It worked brilliantly in the first half at Bristol, but the speedy transition from defence to attack happened all too seldom against Stockport.

One reason was that Rioch, until the vital goal came after exactly an hour, was pulled back as the spare man in defence. It was a role in which he looked out of touch, which surprised me, in view of the success he had at left-half last season.

That left Pleat to form the second spearhead. In fact things did not work out that way, because he seemed to think that his task was to stop the breakthrough by Allen, wearing the No. 10 shirt. But Allen switched with Sykes (No. 6) immediately play began.

In consequence, Town had both inside-forwards tending to lie deep, and Kevan was left to plough a lonely furrow down the middle, except for French, who tried his best to escape close marking.

Pattern of the Stockport play which has brought so many narrow victories this season is simple. Their full-backs do not leave their wingers for a moment, and the vastly experienced Stuart and Woods control the middle with complete economy of effort. Gaps seldom appear.

Their attacking formula mainly is to bang the ball down the middle, so that willing chasers like East and Sykes can harass opposing defence.

When last night's goal came, it was desperately bad luck for Swan. He pushed Sykes's first effort brilliantly on to the bar but could do nothing about his second effort, as the rebound fell kindly to the Stockport player.

Swan, who is on trial for the time being, looked extremely good, cutting out high crosses easily and showing plenty of courage under pressure. I should say he has gone a long way towards solving Town's goalkeeper problem.

As soon as the goal came Rioch reverted to his striking role, but he is in a bad patch just now. Whit-

taker was no more effective, and for Town to have on wing largely out of joint was a tremendous handicap.

Town applied pressure in the later stages, but with little sign of getting a goal. As Moore moved up from defence to help in search of an equaliser, a couple more chances fell to Stockport; and Town's crossbar was twice clipped, once when Swan saved.

During the whole match I can recall no more than two scoring efforts that I would term worthwhile. Both came from Kevan, who worked very hard in most uninviting circumstances.

I have nothing but praise for Town's defence. Often it was overworked, but it marked tightly, with Thomson and Jardine both on top against two nippy wingers. Good covering came from Riddick and Moore.

Dougan received a knock on the head early on and perhaps that was why he was not quite so dominating as usual.

It all added up to the situation we have seen too often before—the defence trying bravely to hang on to goalless equality, knowing that a single goal against them would probably settle the issue. And so it proved.

As I see it, Town's problem is how far to act on the experience of the last two matches to gain more striking power. I should say that changes, apart from the probable return of Alan Slough next week, are a possibility at least.

Attendance: 9,555.