

LUCKY TO ESCAPE LIGHTLY

66/67

LUTON TOWN 0,
HARTLEPOOLS UNITED 2

THERE is no doubt that the Town lost themselves a lot of friends by the depressing quality of their display in the return match with Hartlepool on Monday.

Which was unfortunate, because the crowd of 7,370 was bigger than their recent average, and a good showing might have enabled them to retain some of those who are habitués of the Kenilworth Road terraces only on rare occasions.

Yet the way in which they began gave no indication of the tawdry way in which they were to finish, because, with more accuracy in front of goal, they could have had two, maybe three goals, in the first ten minutes or so.

Allen, Jardine and French all missed during this spell when the Hartlepool defence was in trouble, which they never encountered to the same degree afterwards.

Not until PARRY gave the visitors the lead after 22 minutes did the thought of defeat enter the heads of the home fans, and thereafter such a line of reasoning was never far away.

Certainly after McGOVERN secured a second goal 11 minutes from half-time, when his shot went under Swan's body, there was little show of defiance.

Expectations of a full-blooded rally after the interval were never anything near fruition and, indeed, they were fortunate not to concede more goals.

Their defence was largely over-run by the visitors' eager forwards, and Phythian, Parry and Mulvaney all missed chances, while Bircumshaw hit the bar from a free kick which looked as if it should have been a penalty.

French, who had never looked at all happy, went off after 63 minutes, apparently through feeling pain in his shoulder which nearly put him out of the match altogether, and Read came on as substitute.

ABSENCE MADE NO DIFFERENCE

But French's absence made no difference, because he had contributed little anyway, and there was no recognisable pattern about the Town's play after the second goal from Hartlepool.

While Swan had to make a number of saves, the only time that Green was seriously inconvenienced was when Read tested him.

Really, it was difficult to reconcile the sparkle of the opening stages with the apparent sluggishness that developed later, but the Hartlepool defence was much the more sound, and they showed far more determination than did the Town.

With French off form, Whittaker falling away after a bright start, and King running into all sorts of trouble, only Allen looked as if he might emerge as the saviour.

Although Phythian did not score, he was more than a match for Rivers, who had a thoroughly uncomfortable time, and Dougan seemed torn between the need to provide cover in the middle and his own job.

Pleat, who was barely recovered from back trouble, tried hard, but those nearest to their best form were Moore and Jardine, with Conboy a little disappointing as the deputy for the injured Thomson.

LUTON TOWN: Swan; Conboy, Jardine; Dougan, Rivers, Moore; French (Read), Allen, Pleat, King, Whittaker.

HARTLEPOOLS UNITED: Green; Bircumshaw, Drysdale; McLeod, Aston, Parry; McGovern, Broadbent, Phythian, Mulvaney, Somers. Substitute: Livingstone.

Referee: W. G. Handley, Cannock.