

Town fritter chances in Christmas charity

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN'S forwards dispensed their Christmas charity with gay abandon in their home match with Wrexham this afternoon, and in the first half let chance after chance slip by.

Thus, instead of the Town having the interval lead they deserved, the score-sheet was still blank when the teams began the second half. Not until after 62 minutes did the Town nose ahead with a goal by Rioch.

Not unexpectedly, the Town left out Graham French and brought in John Ryan, while the other change from Thursday night's game with Oxford City, involved the welcome return to centre-half of Terry Branston.

Wrexham made a surprise move by leaving out Steve Ingle, whom they rate in the £25,000 class. He made way for Alan Bermingham, who won fame during that fine cup run of the amateur side Skelmersdale United last season.

It was a dry, crisp day, and the pitch was in good condition, but at the start the crowd looked below the recent average, probably because Christmas shopping and, of course, the bus strike, was having a cumulative effect.

TOWN NEAR TO TAKING LEAD

Uncertainty in the Town defence made Wrexham look more dangerous in the opening minutes, and Kinsey had a shot stopped by Jardine, after Read had pushed out one from Smith.

There was a prompt reply by the Town with Whittaker having a hard centre deflected for a corner. Wrexham then had an amazing escape when Livsey, down on the ground, failed to collect a shot by Rioch. Somehow, Bradbury stopped Buxton's attempt to turn the ball over the line from point-blank range.

A chance went begging when Ryan failed to hit the ball squarely in a scramble in front of goal after Allen had headed the ball downwards. In the end, the ball trickled slowly to Livsey.

TWO NEED ATTENTION

Ryan was quite prominent, though, and when he was sent away by Buxton, he obliged with a slide-rule centre to which Livsey just managed to beat both Buxton and Allen as they closed in.

There was a short stoppage while Stacey received attention for an injury, and then the Town trainer, Dennis Evans, came on to have a look at the back of Buxton's head where their seemed to be a gash, but the verdict was that it did not require stitching.

The Town were on top without looking really dangerous, though half-chances kept cropping up.

Slough was brought down by Stacey, but Wrexham were taking no unnecessary chances in defence, and Bradbury had no hesitation in giving away a corner.

A long clearance kick by Read which eventually reached Buxton brought the Town's next raid, and with it a low centre by Whittaker. Slough, racing into the inside-left position, met it with the outside of his foot to steer the ball towards the goal, but Livsey was well placed and saved at full length.

AMAZING LET-OFF FOR WREXHAM

The pitch was very sticky in places, which was not helping the accuracy of the football. The first 20 minutes, in fact, had not produced the excitement expected, even though there had been some close calls.

Then came an amazing let-off for Wrexham when Bermingham made a most ill-advised back pass which went

straight to Allen, standing between him and Livsey. It seemed 99 per cent certain that the centre-forward would score, but the remaining one per cent turned up. It seemed as though Allen was altogether too confident about it, because his shot was close enough to the goalkeeper for him to push it out. Even then, Whittaker, racing in, had a chance, only to be foiled by Bradbury, who gave away a corner.

TOWN TURN ON THE PRESSURE

Twice in the exchanges that followed Allen tried to make amends for his miss, but each time his header was off the target.

Now, the Town were turning on the pressure, and Dougan came racing up to join the attack, finally finishing on his back on the running track at the side of the goal.

The Wrexham defence conceded yet another corner, but the Town were not profiting much from this type of award.

Wrexham were now confined to breakaway in which their forward line, operating mostly on three members, was not very dangerous.

WREXHAM BREAK OUT AT LAST

Clever work by Rioch and Allen was halted on the edge of their opponents' penalty area for Wrexham to break away and produce their first scoring effort. Kinsey's shot was deflected, not all that much, by Branston, and the ball narrowly missed the far post with Read diving but never getting within touching range of the ball.

Quite the best effort for Luton so far came when Rioch went boring through the defence in his best style, only to be unlucky enough to see his great right-footed drive thud against a post with Livsey well beaten.

IT'S ALL TOWN JUST NOW

Two more corners came as the Town's pressure mounted again, the second when a drive by Moore from 25 yards was diverted. Now Branston was going right upfield for these flag kicks, but so far had not been able to make contact with his head.

The Town were firmly on top and should have had goals to show for it by now.

THE REFEREE BECOMES UNPOPULAR

The referee became unpopular with the fans when he penalised Whittaker for a foul on Bermingham when the winger had got clear from the tussle and was bearing dangerously into goal.

The referee regained some of his stripes when he operated the advantage rule after Stacey had handled in a bid to prevent a pass reaching Ryan. The attack fizzled out, however with Buxton being beaten by weight of numbers.

Another gilt-edged chance fell to the Town and that, too, was wasted. It was brilliantly worked out for Allen by Rioch. The inside-left began it, and Buxton provided the final pass. On raced Allen to shoot as Livsey came out and Turner challenged but this time he was well of the mark.

So far this had not been Allen's day. Again, he was sent through with a clear run, but from a much more difficult position this time, he

the urgent way in which they were trying to drive on their raids. Branston was going up continually for corners.

The game was still mainly a duel between the Town forwards and Wrexham's defence. In attack the visitors were still relying on the quick break-out.

Buxton was nearer than most Town forwards with a drive from 25 yards that just missed the near post.

Wrexham were having to defend desperately in the face of the Town's unrelenting pressure and this was cutting down the number of clear-cut openings.

A GOAL FOR THE TOWN

What luck that was going was favouring the Wrexham defence, as it did when the ball fell loose but awkwardly for Buxton after a corner.

Then, in the 62nd minute, the stalemate which was



threatening to become final was ended with a typical goal by RIOCH.

In a quickly executed Town raid, the ball was pushed through sharply by Allen, and Rioch coming up at top pace, was on it in a trice. He at least made no mistake, because he got his left foot firmly behind the ball and planted it low into the corner of the net for his tenth goal in League matches this season.

WREXHAM ROUSED TO ATTACK

Wrexham hit back, but were checked quickly. They came again, and Read saved from



Bruce Rioch put the Town deservedly ahead with a great second-half goal.

TEAMS

LUTON TOWN: Read; Dougan, Jardine; Slough, Branston, Moore; Ryan, Buxton, Allen, Rioch, Whittaker. Substitute: McDermott.

WREXHAM: Livsey; Bermingham, Stacey; Bradbury, Turner, Powell; Beanland, Weston, Smith, Kinsey, Griffiths. Substitute: Ingle.

Referee: Mr. H. Williams, of Sheffield.

was marginally off target.

Half-time:

LUTON TOWN .. 0

WREXHAM 0

Wrexham brought on their substitute, Ingle, for the second half, in place of centre-forward Smith, who was suffering from slight concussion. Although Ingle is now regarded primarily as a full-back, he did considerable service in the forward line during his time with Bradford City.

The Town resumed where they had left off, forcing Wrexham into deep defensive positions. From a corner, Whittaker tried to wriggle a way through the massed opposition but was dispossessed.

Ryan tried a long dribble into the middle, which ended by his being brought down from behind. The free kick brought nothing, mainly because the boggy of offside tactics was beginning to raise its head again.

The Town's need to take the lead was beginning to show in

Kinsey at the second attempt, the ball finally coming to him off the bar.

The Town were soon pressing again, and Allen nearly had some consolation for his earlier disappointments when he took advantage of hesitation in defence to beat Livsey with a low drive. It was aimed for the far corner, but went outside the post by a narrow margin.

Wrexham were trying for an equaliser, and Griffiths lobbed the ball on top of the bar.

Another goal to the Town would have been welcome and it might have come had Whittaker chosen to steady

How the goals came

RIOCH for Luton after

62 minutes

MOORE (own goal) for Wrex-

ham after 84 minutes.

BRANSTON for Luton

after 86 minutes.

himself rather than shoot hurriedly after Allen had pushed the ball on, following a penetrative run by Jardine.

Then, Rioch just failed to get the touch that could have made certain, and the ball rolled to safety.

WREXHAM LEVEL, BUT NOT FOR LONG

With only six minutes left Wrexham drew level, through an "own goal." The Town defence moved out of the penalty area, hoping for an offside decision, and the ball was lobbed into a sort of Nomansland. It bobbed about, and finally MOORE, playing for safety, tried to pass back to Read, but sent it wide of the goalkeeper's hands and into the roof of the net.

Two minutes later, the Town throwing everything into attack, regained the lead. BRANSTON went up for a corner and headed in from Whittaker's kick.

Result:

LUTON TOWN .. 2

WREXHAM 1