

BRANSTON CAME TO RESCUE AGAIN

Threatened goal famine was ended by him

By CHILTERN

LUTON TOWN 2, BRADFORD 0

ANY idea there might have been that Bradford, anchored at the foot of the table, would prove to be easy holiday pickings for the Town at Kenilworth Road on Boxing Day, proved to be anything but the case though, in the end, the Town had no real difficulty in preserving their 100 per cent home record.

There were probably two main factors that caused them to have to struggle into the second half until they got their heads in front.

One was the very heavy state of the pitch and the other the absence of top scorer Bruce Rioch, whose strength on the ball and powerful shooting might well have been ideally suited to the conditions.

That Rioch did not play was a late decision, based on the fact that he had some fluid on a knee, following a knock at Barnsley and caused two late changes.

Original intention was to rest Slough to enable McDerment to have a full game at right-half, but the latter

was needed for inside-left and there was an SOS for Slough to fill his usual position.

On better going this might have been easy for the Town, who, however, found that the ball needed a good deal of pulling through the mud and made accuracy in front of goal difficult to achieve.

BIGGEST GATE IN IN FOURTH DIVISION

So the first half, during which the Town attacked the heavier Oak-road end, was largely a disappointment for the 16,599 fans, comfortably the Town's biggest attendance since they dropped into the Fourth Division.

The conditions, combined with the fact that Bradford raced back to pack their penalty area whenever danger threatened, which was often, meant that the goals that frequently looked imminent just did not arrive.

Hardie saved at full length from Whittaker and McDerment before Allen blazed the ball across the face of the goal, but the Town's moment seemed to have arrived when Down most blatantly pulled down the ball with his hand inside the penalty area.

WHITTAKER'S SPOT FAILURE

Whittaker, usually so trustworthy with this type of award, shot the wrong side of a post and this mostly set the pattern for the rest of the half.

Allen, Ryan, Buxton and Slough all went close, but not close enough and, meantime, Taylor's only serious task came after half an hour when he had to race out to smother an attempt by Draper.

Taylor, on trial from Partick Thistle, was given this chance so that an assessment of his

ability could be made, but there was little opportunity for that and, apart from another good save late in the game from Clancy, he was little troubled, though he did show good judgment in leaving his goal.

BRANSTON DID THE TRICK

As it was in the last home game, it was left to the skipper, BRANSTON, to come along with a vital, if not decisive, goal.

With 52 minutes gone, he came right upfield for a corner by Ryan and met the ball squarely with his head to send it into the corner of the net. A couple of minutes later he nearly repeated the feat, being a few inches too high this time.

After that, the Town's authority was never in real dispute and, 13 minutes later WHITTAKER atoned for his earlier miss by scoring from the spot after Buxton had been fouled.

This produced quite a tough reaction from Bradford and, in quick succession, Tanner and Andrews were booked by the referee.

An ankle injury to McDerment then brought on as substitute, Read, who went to centre-forward, with Allen switching to inside-left, but further Town pressure failed to produce any more goals.

There was a late show of defiance by Bradford and, after Ryan had shot wide from a good position, Clancy might have clipped the visitors' arrears in almost the last minute.

This was a workmanlike, rather than brilliant performance by the Town, who were affected more badly by the conditions than were Bradford, who found the game slowed down to their taste.

RIOCH WAS BADLY MISSED

Rioch, no doubt, was badly missed because although McDerment showed some neat touches, he had nothing like Rioch's power and, with Slough still fighting to regain his best form, the midfield link was not all it might have been.

From both Allen and Buxton there was plenty of hard work, but neither found the goal touch, even though Ryan and Whittaker provided a fair percentage of centres, but the former sometimes hung on to the ball when he should have parted with it.

With their seventh clean sheet in 11 home matches, the defence was not in much trouble, with Branston, ably abetted by Moore, a great bulwark, and Dougan and Jardine mostly limiting the threat from the wings.

LUTON TOWN: Taylor; Dougan, Jardine; Slough, Branston, Moore; Ryan, Buxton, Allen, McDerment (Read), Whittaker.

BRADFORD: Hardie; Andrews, Rowley; Lightowler, Dinsdale, Tanner; Clancy, Ham, Down, Draper, Robinson. Substitute: Barnes.

Referee: B. H. Daniels, Rainham.