

TOWN FIND IT TOUGH 'NEEDLE' GAME

Brighton take a shock lead

By CHILTERN

IN a game bedevilled by "needle," frequent fouls and offside tactics, Luton Town had the new experience of turning round a goal in arrears on their visit to Brighton today.

It came almost on the stroke of half-time, much to Town's chagrin. They had played a tight defensive game, but were faced in the second half with the need to come out and attack if they were to preserve their unbeaten record.

Two of the three fitness problems which faced the Town overnight were resolved this morning.

Keith Allen, who had been doubtful because of gastric trouble, reported fighting fit, which filled the gap left by John Moore, who is likely to be out for a month or six weeks with torn ligaments of the ankle.

Two players were given tests on the promenade this morning and there was 50 per cent success here. Terry Branston, about whom there was only a slight doubt, came through with flying colours, but Max Dougan still felt his groin injury and was ruled out in favour of Billy McDerment.

There is a reasonable chance that Dougan will be fit for the visit to Everton on Tuesday.

FRENCH RESTED

Surprise in attack was that John Ryan was preferred to Graham French, who became the substitute, but manager Allan Brown emphasised that he was rested, not dropped.

So in the event, the journey yesterday of Ian Buxton from Derby was unnecessary. Buxton arrived around 10 o'clock last night, by which time it seemed pretty clear that Allen would be able to play.

Weatherwise, this was a bright and breezy Brighton, with the accent on the breeze, which promised to be a major factor. There looked like being a reasonably big crowd, including a large number from Luton.

TOWN ADVANTAGE

Branston won the toss, which gave the Town the distinct advantage of having the wind behind them.

Lewis schemed the first Town raid and sent away Harrison, but the winger failed to allow for the strength of the wind, and the ball went behind.

Brighton hit back with a swinging attack, and after a centre by Wilkinson had gone right across the goal, Brighton gained a corner, which Read cut out.

There was a slight threat during a mix up between Branston and Read after Jardine had passed back, and then Branston needed attention after bringing down Kit Napier some ten yards outside the penalty area.

However, the injury was not allied to his previous trouble, and he was all right almost immediately.

Brighton were again finding

TEAMS

BRIGHTON: Burns; Henderson, Gall; Turner, Napier (J), Smith; Wilkinson, Lawton, Napier (K), Livesey, Armstrong. Sub. Tawse.

LUTON: Read; McDerment, Jardine; Allen, Branston, Slough; Ryan, Lewis, Sheffield, Rioch, Harrison. Sub. French.

Referee: K. E. Walker, Bearsted.

difficulty in overcoming the Town's offside trap.

After Sheffield had been penalised for a foul on Turner, who retaliated, the referee called both players aside and spoke to them.

Read was penalised for carrying the ball more than four paces to give Brighton an indirect free kick inside the penalty area, but they wasted it completely.

NIGGLING FOULS

Some niggling fouls were taking place, as when Livesey pulled down Slough as he tried to break through, and from the free-kick Rioch's shot was beaten down.

Twice Read had to race out to cut off through passes which were being chased by Kit Napier, and then Allen was unlucky to see a powerful drive from 20 yards hit John Napier on the head when Burns might well have been fully extended.

After 21 minutes, Lawton had his name taken by the referee for fouling Rioch, who had to receive attention.

From the start of this game there had been evidence of "needle."

TIGHT DEFENCE

Fortunately, Rioch made a quick recovery and almost immediately started an attack by putting the ball through to Lewis. The inside-right did his familiar jockeying for position, but this time was forced to shoot from longer range than he would have liked.

Allen then up-rooted Lawton, but the Town were playing tightly in defence, and the free-kick brought nothing. More dangerous was a high centre from Lawton, to which Read beat the oncoming Armstrong.

FREQUENT FOULS

Fouls continued to be frequent, the count in the first 25 minutes being seven-seven.

Conditions were not easy,

the ball being lively in the wind, though the pitch itself looked very good.

Just about the best chance so far fell to Brighton when Wilkinson crashed the ball low across the face of the goal, but Armstrong, racing in, missed it completely.

Like the Town, Brighton were not giving away much in defence.

The Town's best movement for some time was between Lewis and Slough, with the latter finally racing into the penalty area for the through pass, to which Gall just beat him.

STOPPAGES

Any chance of a smooth pattern of play emerging was being spoilt by the number of stoppages. Branston was penalised for bringing down Kit Napier, who, from the free-kick, forced Read to a full-length save.

When Allen, right up supporting the attack, dispossessed Kit Napier, he was brought down from behind three or four yards outside the penalty area. By and large, however, free kicks were not profitable, and this one, taken by McDerment, was headed clear.

SPECULATIVE

Such shooting as there was, became speculative, like one from McDerment, who tried his luck from 25 yards.

Allen and Branston both came to the Town's rescue with headers following yet another free kick, this time against Ryan, and immediately afterwards Read made a point-blank save from a header by Wilkinson following a long throw-in.

Wilkinson was injured in the attempt, and also penalised for pushing.

On the stroke of half-time, Brighton took the lead in a sudden rush. The ball came across in the air from Lawton on the left. Read should have cut it out, but did not do so, and WILKINSON rushed the ball over the line to put the Town in arrears after 44 minutes.

Half-time:

BRIGHTON 1
LUTON 0

The Town restarted on the attack, Rioch forcing Burns to save.

Then came a chance to Brighton when the Town's offside trap twice failed to function.

First, Kit Napier was left with a clear run to goal but lost control. It went eventually to Wilkinson, who was in a good position, but he shot wide of the near post.

Determination by Sheffield took the Town on to the attack, and a dangerous centre

by Harrison was deflected behind.

When the corner came across, there was a mild appeal for a penalty when Allen went down, but nothing happened.

Ryan and Harrison between them gained another corner. Lewis tried a big inswinger, but Burns pulled it expertly off the heads of Branston and Ryan.

Lawton, who must have been treading on dangerous ground, since he had already been booked, committed a foul on Slough, who was hurt.

A timely headed intervention by McDerment, which cost a corner, probably saved the Town another goal, because Armstrong was closing in dangerously.

The Town had a chance to equalise following a free kick. Allen's centre came across, Branston was on the spot, only to plant the ball wide of the post.

ALLEN "BOOKED"

Second booking of the match came after 59 minutes when Allen pulled down Wilkinson from behind and his name went into the referee's book.

The Town were badly needing a goal, and Rioch did his best with a long corkscrew run which ended with his being unable to get enough power into his shot.

However, a corner followed, from which Allen made a spectacular header which looked to be booked for the corner of the net until Burns and Smith between them managed to stop it.

From the corner which followed, Allen again got his head to the ball, but without much force.

The Town were pressing hard now, and Burns was hurt as he dived at Sheffield's feet, the Town's centre-forward being penalised.

BREAK-OUT

The Town really had the bit between their teeth, and McDerment, trying the overlap, was fouled just outside the pantly area, but Ryan's kick was badly placed, however, and from the clearance, Brighton broke away through Livesey. His cross was met by Turner, and Read had to dive at the near post.

With the Town putting more accent on attack, more gaps were appearing in their defence, and Brighton seemed to have more of an inkling how to beat the offside trap.

GREAT SAVE

Read made a great save in mid-air from a tremendous drive by Livesey.

Play was moving fast from end to end, and first Sheffield and then Livesey banged shots well over the bar.

With 19 minutes left, the Town called off Slough probably for fear of aggravating his previous injury, and brought on French, Allen falling back.

Straight away French made his mark with a strong run and a left-footed shot not all that far off the target.

The Town were throwing everything in now in an attempt to equalise.

Livesey should have put the result beyond doubt when, with the Town defence expecting him to pass, he went straight through. When all seemed lost, Read stuck his feet out and saved.

Just when Rioch seemed to have worked out a scoring opening, he was hooked down,

giving the Town a free kick eight yards outside the penalty area. There was a lot of jockeying for position, but Rioch provided an anti-climax by smacking the ball low against the wall of defenders.

Rioch was pulled down again in almost the same spot. This time, he pushed the free kick sideways to Harrison, whose drive hit a defender on the head and was diverted for a corner.

Branston had now taken up almost permanent position in

How the goal came

WILKINSON for Brighton after 44 minutes

the Brighton penalty area as the Town fought desperately for a goal. In fact, all the Brighton players were now back in defence.

Lawton nearly put any prospect of a late saver by the Town out of court with a drive that missed by inches and at the other end Sheffield headed wide.

Result:

BRIGHTON 1
LUTON TOWN ... 0