

Home fans cheer a victory in the mud

By CHILTERN

THE TOWN looked set for a return to winning form in front of the home fans this afternoon. Although conditions were against good football, and Hartlepool were packing their defence, Luton were well on top in the first half.

They changed over a goal up, Sheffield having converted a Whittaker centre after 27 minutes. Then, just after the restart, Rioch dashed through to score the second, and the Town looked confident of taking both points.

There was some doubt about the match being played, and it wasn't until the referee had spent about ten minutes running on the pitch with a ball that he decided that it was not too waterlogged for the game to go on.

As a result, there were less than 40 minutes to go before kick-off time when the gates were opened, and meanwhile queues had congregated at each end of the ground.

Even at that stage four men were forking the pitch on the main stand side where it was very heavy, and I am told that a considerable amount of forking went on in the Oak Road goalmouth, where water tends to gather because of the fall of the ground.

One victim of the weather was the match between Orient and Northampton, and the players of the latter club, bearing in mind their visit to Luton a fortnight today, were here in force to weigh up the opposition.

FOUR CHANGES

There were four changes in the Town team compared with the one beaten at Barnsley on Tuesday, and three of them were in the forward line. French and Lewis resumed their right-wing partnership and Whittaker made his first home appearance of the season in place of the injured Harrison.

There was something of a re-shuffle too among the Hartlepool team, who are

TEAMS

LUTON TOWN: Taylor; McDerment, Jardine; Allen, Branston, Slough; French, Lewis, Sheffield, Rioch, Whittaker. Substitute: Buxton.

HARTLEPOOL: Smith; Bircumshaw, Drysdale; Sheridan, Gill, Goad; Young, Bell, Cummings, Wright, Hepplewhite. Substitute: Blowman.

Referee: Mr. R. Kirkpatrick, of Leicester.

struggling near the foot of the table, having won only one match this season.

Branston lost the toss and Hartlepool elected to defend the Oak Road goal. From the start the Town went right on to the attack, forcing Hartlepool back into deep and somewhat crowded defensive positions.

The soggy turf was producing mistakes and inaccuracies, and there was still a good deal of water on the surface.

Throwing off their defensive yoke for a time, Hartlepool launched an attack when Slough allowed the ball to run through, but Bell's shot was well wide.

Twice the Town were caught offside when having reached a promising position.

Best attempt for the Town came from Rioch after a quickfire passing movement with Whittaker, but his shot went wide.

BRANSTON OFF

In the tenth minute the Town lost the service of Branston. He hopped off the field on one leg, with a gash



SHEFFIELD dived to meet Whittaker's centre and put the Town ahead after 27 minutes.

on the inside of the other which the club doctor hastened to stitch.

While thus handicapped, the Town could have snatched the lead but for some indecisiveness near goal on the part of Lewis and Sheffield.

To fill the gap left by Branston's departure, Slough switched to centre-half with Rioch dropping right back.

In the main, Hartlepool were concentrating on packing their defence, and when they did break out they tended to be caught in the Town's offside trap.

Obstruction by McDerment on Hepplewhite brought Hartlepool a free kick just outside the penalty area on the left flank, but the Hartlepool shooting was not remarkable for its accuracy and Wright sent high over.

After an absence of four minutes, Branston returned to take up his normal position,

and was soon issuing instructions.

The Town were being caught offside, and twice Lewis, thus penalised, looked hard at the linesman responsible.

GOAL THREAT

A foul on Lewis out near the corner flag brought the most dangerous threat to the Hartlepool goal so far. French's free kick was pushed out, but he regained possession and Lewis met his centre squarely with his head, aiming for the far corner. He appeared to have scored, until Smith took off to make a sensational one-handed save near the far post.

Then after 27 minutes the Town at last took the lead, with SHEFFIELD the scorer. Lewis cleverly sent away Whittaker and his centre was reached by Sheffield, who dived forward, and the ball actually bounced in front of goal before rising into the roof of the net, with Smith helpless.

Wright was injured when Sheffield barged into him, but quickly recovered after attention, during which the referee took the centre-forward aside for a quiet word.

In the next minute Sheffield was firmly unloaded with his feet kicked from under him by Gill, and from the free-kick Rioch shot weakly wide.

PERFECT CENTRE

Another Luton goal seemed imminent following a brilliant move in which Branston found



A fine goal by RIOCH after 49 minutes put the Town in a strong position.

Allen in the left-wing position. Allen beat a man before sending across a perfect centre, which Lewis met with his head, only for the ball to go inches wide.

The spoiling tactics of the Hartlepool defenders were causing several Town attacks to break down prematurely, and a good chance for Lewis was spoilt by a foul by Goad, who was spoken to by the referee.

Slough took the free kick and sent the ball soaring just wide of the angle of the woodwork.

JARDINE SAVES

When Hartlepool set up a full scale attack, Jardine coolly saved the situation after Branston had sliced his clearance.

When the Town hit back, Smith just managed to snatch the ball away from the feet of Whittaker, who was streaming down the inside-right position.

Free kicks were mounting against Hartlepool. One for a foul on Allen, was chipped to the goalmouth by Rioch, but Lewis was caught offside.

Just before half-time there was a narrow escape for the Town. A speculative shot by Cummings was deflected when it struck Allen, and with Taylor stranded it was as well that the ball was just the wrong side of the post.

Then Taylor had to come out to snatch the ball away from the feet of Wright when a back pass by Branston failed to carry.

A free kick to the Town brought a header from Sheffield, which was scrambled away. Half-time:

LUTON 1
HARTLEPOOL ... 0

There was a strong resumption by the Town in which Rioch—twice—and Lewis went close to causing real trouble to the visiting defence.

Then after 49 minutes came a typical RIOCH goal that set the crowd roaring their heads

off. The ball came out quickly from defence down the middle of the field, where Rioch was on it in a trice. He made a bee-line for goal, held off a challenge by Drysdale, and as Smith came out drove the ball inches inside the post.

When Hartlepool came back there was a deliberate case of handling by Branston some yards outside the penalty area. The free kick brought a corner which Taylor, who had not been tested so far, pulled down capably.

There was a hold-up when Goad received a facial injury in an accidental clash with Lewis, but he was able to carry on, holding a sponge in his right hand.

A well-placed free kick by Whittaker brought some trouble at the visitors' end, and Sheffield went up to connect with his head, but all that accrued was a goal kick.

A foul by Slough gave Hartlepool a chance to make

some progress, and the free kick taken by Bircumshaw brought a rare old mix-up in front of the Town goal, with Slough unsighting Taylor as he jumped for the ball. It was a relief when it finally went behind, off Slough's head.

How the goal came

SHEFFIELD for Luton after 27 minutes.

RIOCH for Luton after 49 minutes.

LEWIS for Luton after 77 minutes.

There was a shock at the Town end when, after obstruction by Slough, Hepplewhite placed the free-kick to Bell, who headed it firmly in the net. But the referee promptly disallowed it, probably for an infringement on Taylor.

Straight from this the Town broke away through Allen, whose through pass was allowed to run on by Lewis to Whittaker. The winger was badly angled and shot wide of the near post.

PRESSURE

After this there followed another spell of pressure by the Town in which French was prominent, and Smith did well to pull down from under the bar a well-timed header by Sheffield.

Yet another foul on Rioch brought a free-kick from Whittaker, from which Allen



tried to break through only to be pulled down by weight of numbers.

When Hartlepool threw more weight into their front line there was a full-scale attack, finally staved off with Slough emerging with the ball from the ruck.

Some slack marking in defence nearly led to a disaster as Young came in to meet bouncing ball with his head. With Taylor indecisive the ball rolled just wide of a post. Certainly, the Town were not in such a strong position as to be able to give a goal away.

Hartlepool were certainly showing fight, but their finishing was a long way from being impressive.

Whatever slight doubt there might have been about this result was spectacularly removed in the 77th minute, when LEWIS increased the Town's lead.

Much of the credit for the goal belongs to Allen, who took the ball away from Goad, and slid it across field, where Lewis was standing in the inside-left position. Lewis stopped the ball and moved smartly off the mark, beating an opponent before smartly slamming the ball past the helpless Smith.

Now came the removal of a spectator from the Oak Road terrace. He was firmly urged off the ground by a policeman.

A series of mistakes at the Hartlepool end gave promise of another Luton goal, with Sheffield threatening, but finally French, from bang in front, sent the ball too high when it seemed rather more simple to score.

Result:
LUTON 3
HARTLEPOOL ... 0