

IT DEFIES REASONABLE EXPLANATION

HARTLEPOOL 1, LUTON TOWN 0

FRANKLY, the manner in which one Town away match succeeds another with much the same story, and certainly the same result, baffles explanation.

This was the Town's seventh consecutive setback on opponents' grounds, and represented the eighth blank in goals in ten away matches.

If the figures were not there in black and white, it would be just unbelievable, especially in view of the facile way in which goals arrive at Kenilworth Road.

If ever there was the opportunity to halt this dismal run it was at Hartlepool this afternoon, because the North-Eastern team have been finding the going hard in the Third Division.

Yet, they had the determination and tightness in defence to keep out the Town, and also to show sufficient directness in attack to make themselves a distinct threat at times.

All the same, this was a match the Town should not have lost, because on balance they had more of the play, only for the old fault of lack of thrust and penetration in the front line to persist.

There is no doubt that something will have to be done, though what, escapes me at the moment, because all manner of formations in the front line have been tried.

This afternoon there was no question of their going in looking for one point. I firmly believe that they were out for two, but their calculations were upset when they conceded an early goal, for which I am afraid goalkeeper Davie must shoulder the blame. At all events, it put Hartlepool a goal ahead after 11 minutes, and that is how the situation remained until the end.

Chances fell to the Town, many of them created by French, who always looked the forward who might cause disaster to the home defence.

Somehow or another, even allowing for the quickness in covering by the Hartlepool defence, the final directness just was not there.

I am prepared to concede to some extent that the ball did not run too kindly for the Town in front of goal, especially during the closing stages, when Hartlepool were subjected to severe pressure as the Town became almost frantic in their efforts to snatch a point.

At the same time, due regard has to be paid to a brilliant display by goalkeeper Smith, who was eminently safe in cutting out anything from the wings, and who kept Hartlepool's victory safe with a tremendous last-minute save from Lewis, who otherwise did not have a very distinguished game.

In fact, the best of the three inside-forwards was Buxton, who, however, lacked support.

The Town could certainly have done with an in-form Rioch, because Stevenson, clever little player though he looks, spent much of the time finding his feet, as was only to be expected.

When a defence concedes only one goal away from home there cannot be a great deal of criticism, but I still feel that this department will benefit a great deal when Jardine and Moore return.

The Town's promotion bid is beginning to look a long way off, even though they showed a great deal more determination than in some recent away games.

Attendance: 3,887.