

French lays on enough chances

By CHILTERN

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TURNING round a goal down at Hartlepool this afternoon, Luton Town threw everything into attack in the second half in a bid to retrieve the situation and gain their first away point for three months.

The Town found themselves in arrears after only 11 minutes, but had enough of the first half play to have been ahead, had they had someone to apply the finishing touches in front of goal.

The Town were fortunate that Hartlepool was clear of the thick fog affecting the surrounding areas in the North-East. Only ten miles away, visibility was said to be down to ten yards. Here, there had been sunshine and a clear sky.

Overnight, there had been a hard, white frost but this cleared, and the pitch was soft enough to take a stud grip. So, considering everything, conditions could be described as reasonably good.

Yesterday, the Town travelled with 13 players. Today, George Potter was nominated as the substitute, leaving Laurie Sheffield the odd man out.

DEBUTANT

This match marked the first appearance of the former Morton inside-left Maurice Stevenson. He took over from Bruce Rioch, ruled out yesterday because of injury. In a slight defensive reshuffle, Billy McDermott lost his place at left-back. Jack Bannister was switched there, and Keith Allen was recalled at right-half.

With Drysdale under suspension and missing his first match of the season, Alan Goad came in at left-back for Hartlepool.

There was also a change in the Hartlepool attack, where there was a first appearance for Malcolm Thompson, recent centre-forward signing from non-League club Goole Town.

CUP SPY

With an eye on the third round of the Cup, Luton's assistant manager, Brian Whitehouse, went to Tottenham today to have a look at Manchester City.

"They probably play a different game away from what they do at home, but it will give us some idea, said manager Allan Brown.

SQUARE POSTS

This is one of the few remaining grounds I know where use is still made of the old-fashioned, square goal-posts, and I seem to remember that they deprived the Town of a goal on a previous visit.

A cold wind helped to keep down the attendance down below Hartlepool's average, for scarcely more than 4,000 watched the start.

Branston won the toss, and took what advantage the wind had to offer. From the start, the Town adopted a 4-2-4 formation. Early play suggested that the surface was treacherous, and players were slipping about.

When the sun came out, which it did fitfully, it was coming from directly over the Town goal.

After Slough had shot narrowly wide from a long free-kick, Hartlepool launched their first dangerous raid. Young made a low cross, and although Davie shaped to collect it, Branston stepped in to concede a corner.

END TO END

A similar situation developed at the other end, when French tried to force in a centre by Harrison. The corner was followed by another, and was cleared promptly.

Hartlepool were dangerous in sharp raids.

Davie next had to go full-length to keep out a low drive by Young from a good

TEAMS

HARTLEPOOL: Smith; Bircumshaw, Goad; Sheridan, Gill, Parry; Blowman, Cummings, Thompson, Wright, Young. Substitute; Tunstall.

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Dougan, Bannister; Allen, Branston, Slough; French, Lewis, Buxton, Stevenson, Harrison. Substitute: Potter. Referee: Mr. D. Fieldsend, Sheffield.

pass by Thompson. That represented the best chance yet to either side, and Hartlepool, encouraged by this began to press.

HARTLEPOOL GOAL

And it paid off in the 11th minute when Hartlepool took the lead through BLOWMAN.

The start of it was a free-kick out on the right, placed high into the goalmouth by Bircumshaw, Davie made a somewhat half-hearted, one-fisted punch at it and the ball fell into the ruck of players in front of goal. Young had a shot cleared by Dougan, but Blowman scored easily from close in when the ball went straight to him.

This was a considerable blow to the Town's prospects, but they hit back, and Smith had to go full-length to keep out a header by Allen following a free-kick by Slough.

Harrison received a knock on the head, but was quickly all right.

So far, the Town forwards had not made any marked impression on a rugged defence, which was funneling back quickly to fill their penalty area.

As a result, although the Town were beginning to have more of the play they were not creating any shooting openings.

BUXTON SHINES

Buxton flashed into the picture with a long run and a pass to Lewis, who, however, was promptly tackled. Lewis next got himself offside, to bring to an end another raid of some promise.

In an attempt to improve matters, French took on two opponents but was overwhelmed in the end. Then, Slough, trying to drive the Town on, came through, and from his pass Stevenson had a shot beaten down. Finally, Allen sliced the ball weakly wide.

TOWN ON TOP

Without any doubt, the Town had gained the upper hand without giving much impression that they had the power to equalise. Yet, there would have been trouble for Hartlepool, when from the left, Lewis swung in a corner dangerously, but the capable Smith made a brilliant catch, though harassed.

After this, Hartlepool had a turn on attack, and there was rather more than half a chance for Cummings from a pass by Blowman. However, the inside-right did not get hold of the ball properly, which was just as well for the Town.

The Town's best chance of

an equaliser fell to Harrison. The winger came racing in to meet a centre from French. Buxton allowed the ball to pass him, but the outside-left smacked it the wrong side of the near post.

On the evidence so far, the Town's best chance seemed to be to concentrate on bringing their wingers, especially French, into the game.

In their snap raids, Hartlepool were certainly direct, and Blowman hit the outside of the near post in one of them.

TANTALISING

Slough seemed to be getting rather more than his share of free kicks, and after another had dropped in a ruck of players, Lewis was left with a chance. He curled the ball tantalisingly near the woodwork, but it finished on the wrong side of it.

Certainly the Town could not complain of lack of opportunities, but they just had not the punch to make the most of them.

Play had settled again in the Hartlepool half, and again Smith bravely came out to make a superb catch.

Dougan tried to force things on with a long run, but was met with a blocking, but perfectly fair, tackle that sent him full length.

DEFENCE ON TOP

Hartlepool kept coming into it, with Blowman always a danger, but by and large defences were having the better of the argument.

French was the Town's most dangerous forward, and was laying on some excellent material which was being allowed to go to waste.

Once Harrison could have reached one, but instead he stood to appeal that he had been pushed in the back.

There was nearly another disaster for the Town close to half-time, when Cummings left Young with a glorious chance. The outside-left aimed for the far corner well wide of Davie, but Allen had run back to cover and headed off the line to save a certain goal. That action at least gave the Town something to hope for after the interval. A second goal then would have killed their hopes stone dead.

A free-kick for a foul on Bannister brought the Town a corner on the left, but it was cleared desperately.

Half-time:

HARTLEPOOL ... 1
LUTON 0

Obviously, by the way in which they surged to the attack at the start of the second half, the Town were determined to get a quick equaliser. Certainly, they needed something of that nature to give inspiration in what was becoming an uphill battle.

For this they had largely themselves to blame because the attack just had not been thrustful enough.

Nor, after the early second-half fling were the Town looking like goal-getters, and Hartlepool were yielding little in defence.

OPEN GOAL

When Hartlepool did break away, they should have scored when Allen allowed a throw-in from Bircumshaw to go over his head. That took everybody by surprise, the ball bounced high in front of goal, and from a few yards out, Young headed inches over an open goal.

Gradually, Hartlepool seemed to be regaining a grip, but were caught in the offside trap. It enabled the Town to make some ground, but not for long, because Hartlepool came back through Cummings. As the ball was cleared, Dougan had to have a facial injury repaired, and then Davie was in action, picking up an awkwardly bouncing ball.

Quite the best opening for the Town was worked by Buxton, who sent away Harrison. His cross was deflected

How the goals came

BLOWMAN for Hartlepool after 11 minutes.

for a corner, and this brought a heavy assault. Slough let go a power-drive which Bircumshaw headed over, and from the corner, Lewis had a shot charged down.

In a short spell, we saw the Town forwards in full cry in something like their home form. Buxton next had a shot saved.

TOWN'S BAD LUCK

Smith was next in action dealing with a high centre by French, but Lewis was penalised for a foul.

Smith then certainly saved Hartlepool when he pushed a centre from Harrison away from the head of Lewis. French, racing in, crashed in a shot that struck a defender.

That was a slice of bad luck for the Town, but there are no prizes for that.

Always, Hartlepool after a bout of pressure on their goal, were hitting back hard, and Thompson saw a shot deflected just wide.

Minor injuries continued to be collected by the Town, the next casualty being Stevenson, and again it was facial damage, but he played on.

When Hartlepool came back through the tricky Blowman, Stevenson conceded a corner, from which Young shot straight at Davie.

BAD TEMPER

Hereabouts, some outbreaks of bad temper occurred, without drastic action being deemed necessary.

Another heavy Town raid was driven off by the massed Hartlepool defence.

Now the light had become bad, and I should have thought there was a case for switching on the floodlights.

It was through no lack of effort that the Town were still in arrears, but they were still finding difficulty in getting a clear shot at goal. Buxton managed it, but there was no power behind it.

CLOSING RALLY

Still they were throwing in just about everything now in a bid for an equaliser, and two corners from French proved to be unproductive.

A disputed free-kick out on the left for a foul on Lewis kept the Town on the attack, but Harrison's cross was cleared. Hartlepool were leaving nothing to chance in defence now.

When Hartlepool broke out again, Cummings led a raid at the end of which Dougan was glad to concede a corner.

which Davie collected at the second attempt.

FRANTIC

After frantic scoring attempts by the Town had been driven off, Young suddenly broke away on the right and forced Davie to a diving save. That used up precious seconds.

Almost the Town's last chance came when Harrison was fouled and a corner followed but Slough headed a couple of feet wide.

In the last minute Smith made a brilliant save from Lewis's header and again from Branston. Result:

HARTLEPOOL ... 1
LUTON 0