

Shock goal as Gillingham go defensive

By CHILTERN

TOWN'S QUEST for two much-needed points took a blow in the 44th minute, when a defensive mix-up let in Yeo to give Gillingham an unexpected lead.

Up until this critical point of the game, Luton had made all the running but seemed to lack the killer instinct as Gillingham packed their penalty area with nearly every man available—only Smillie and Yeo staying upfield.

After Watford's defeat last night there was extra incentive for the Town to win because success would bring them within three points of their near neighbours.

Watford's manager Ken Furphy was among the spectators this afternoon, and he had something of a tale of woe about last night's happenings, beginning with a penalty which he thought should never have been awarded.

No change was made in the Town team and Freddie Jardine continued in the role of substitute. On the other hand, Gillingham, apart from welcoming back their leading scorer, Brian Yeo, after injury, made what could only be regarded as a tactical change. Manager Basil Hayward chose ex-Bedford Town player and Northants' cricketer, Ray Bailey to wear the No. 7 shirt.

INCLUSION

Bailey is a wing-half, and his inclusion suggested that the aim was to bolster the defence.

The pitch had dried up completely, and it looked as if the ball would be lively, and difficult to control.

Branton won the toss and decided to kick towards the Oak Road end.

A couple of free-kicks for fouls against Gillingham enabled the Town to make much of the early running, and Allen sliced the ball wide after a neat flick by Lewis.

Gillingham's first preoccupation was obviously going to be on defence, and both Riddick and Bailey were lying very deep.

For all their reinforcement, Gillingham were not looking too happy under pressure and John Simpson had some difficulty in cutting out a corner from French.

Simpson's next task was to deal with a high lob from Moore, in the face of a challenge from Sheffield, and the Town were gradually taking the upper hand.

SWITCHING

Rioch had spent most of the time so far in the middle of the field and he and Lewis were switching about. Simpson was certainly busier than was Davie, who had not been troubled yet, and twice Lewis forced the Gillingham goalkeeper to cut out corners, and then Rioch shot high over from around 20 yards.

A foul by Branton on Yeo enabled Gillingham to make a move to the other end, and they did not avail them much.

It had been a scrappy, somewhat uninspiring first quarter of an hour, with the Town having failed to turn on their usual sparkling start, and seemingly finding difficulty in achieving cohesion.

For all that, they were having much the better of the play and there was a close call for Gillingham when Lewis made a looping centre from the right, which threatened to creep in under the bar as Sheffield and John Simpson went for it together, but in the event it dropped just outside the post.

ATTACKING

Then came by far the best scoring attempt so far when

Rioch picked up a ball in mid-field, made ground quickly and it needed a fine diving save by John Simpson to prevent him from giving the Town the lead.

Then the goalkeeper punched away French's corner and immediately afterwards there was a free-kick for a foul by Weston

TEAMS

LUTON TOWN: Davie, Dougan, Bannister; Slough, Branton, Moore; French, Allen, Sheffield, Lewis, Rioch, Substitute: Jardine.

GILLINGHAM: Simpson (J); Weston, Green; Simpson (T); Williams, Quirke; Bailey, Riddick, Yeo, Smillie, Meredith. Substitute: Woodley.

on Lewis. This from quite a fine angle was taken by Rioch, and the ball went inches over with the goalkeeper looking as if he had been deceived by the flight.

Rioch received a nasty smack at the top of the left thigh in a hard tackle, but carried on without needing attention.

One or two isolated raids by Gillingham were driven off without Davie being called into action and the Town continued to be superior, though they were finding difficulty in making their shooting count in the face of the marked defence.

Lewis, who appeared to have twisted his back earlier, was hurt again when fouled and there was a hold-up while he was attended to.

RECOVERED

All the same, he recovered sufficiently to take the free-kick, which Simpson fisted out, none too confidently.

Only desperate defensive measures by Gillingham kept out the Town after a much more cohesive movement, which ended with Moore, meeting an awkward ball first time, shooting well over.

When the pressure was on, Gillingham's defence was not standing on ceremony. Always they used safety-first measures, and did not hesitate to bang the ball out of play.

AMBITION

Gillingham were still not being very ambitious in attack, but they had the chance to make progress when Slough was penalised for a foul on Bailey. From Williams's long free-kick Yeo had a chance at close range but he did not connect properly, and Davie had an easier task than might have been expected.

NEGATIVE

General standard of play continued to be not very high, and, of course, Gillingham's negative attitude did not improve matters, nor did the fact that the ball was lively and frequently bouncing awkwardly.

There was also some relentless tackling by Gillingham which brought another free-kick against Weston.

There was a quality of persistence about the Town pressure with the end product not arriving in the face of Gillingham's habit of packing the penalty area whenever danger threatened.

At the other end, there was scarcely any threat at all, and in the main only Yeo and Smillie were up there as strikers. However, the chance to make a heavier raid came when Branton floored Riddick, who missed the free-kick with his head and a goal kick resulted.

The referee had a word with Lewis and Riddick after a clash in which the former was the original offender, and again Williams belted the free-kick into the Town penalty area where Bailey put the ball weakly wide.

NIGGLING

There continued to be a lot of niggling fouls, which were not improving the continuity of play.

Then there followed a rare old mix-up in front of the Town goal as Riddick chased a high ball, and it was fortunate that following a misunderstanding between Branton and Davie the ball went for a corner, which was put behind by Smillie.

Then almost on half-time, in the 44th minute, Gillingham took a shock lead following a corner, and again the Town were guilty of defensive uncertainty.

The ball came across from Smillie, who took the corner, and there was a rush for the ball, a mis-kick by someone and in the end YEO scrambled the ball through to give Gillingham a thoroughly unexpected and undeserved lead.

Half-time:

LUTON 0

GILLINGHAM 1

It had been a bad, vastly disappointing first half for the Town, who had failed to achieve anything like their normal home form.

In almost the first minute of the second half Williams was booked, and rightly so, for a bad foul on Rioch just inside the centre circle. Both players needed attention and the centre-half was heartily booed as he resumed.

Rioch seemed none the worse for the experience because he was quickly in action again.

Much of the Gillingham tackling was crude, and Weston brought down Lewis inches outside the penalty area, but Lewis, to whom Rioch tapped the ball, shot too high.

PENALTY?

Gillingham were desperately lucky to escape the award of a penalty when Quirke pulled down Lewis, and the referee, on the spot, would have none of the Town's appeals.

So far the Town were not making much progress in their attempt to improve matters, and they very nearly had another shock when Smillie nipped in and attempted to round Davie. Fortunately, the goalkeeper was quick, and he dived and grabbed the ball.

Rioch was again mostly in his old position, probing away for possible weaknesses, but Gillingham were leaving few gaps in their penalty area.

There was a lively raid in which Slough joined, but it ended in anti-climax, with Moore driving the ball high over.

With limited attacking resources so far as numbers were concerned, Gillingham were still causing some anxiety in their breakaway,

and the Town defence was far from settled.

ROARING

The Town, with the crowd roaring them on, were becoming almost frantic in their efforts to equalise.

Gillingham were still not taking the slightest risk in defence, the tall members of which were dealing with anything in the air. There was



LAURIE SHEFFIELD

nearly a goal from an unexpected quarter when Dougan had a first-time shot that swerved, and John Simpson only just managed to reach it.

Simpson only just managed to pull down a long free-kick from Rioch.

When Gillingham came back on the attack they got a corner when a hard centre by Meredith struck Branton and it was left to French, back in his own penalty area, to clear the threat.

A better movement for the Town was begun by Lewis with a long pass to French, whose centre was stopped at the near post.

French was fortunate to escape a booking at least, when he retaliated against Green. Undoubtedly there had been some provocation.

PROSPECTS

There continued to be a flow of free-kicks for fouls, and with the game three-quarters of the way through, the Town's prospects did not look rosy.

Then immediately there followed a tremendous mix-up in front of the Gillingham goal after Slough had a shot beaten down.

When, finally, everyone had sorted himself out, there was a somewhat strange decision by the referee to re-start play by a drop-ball inside the six-yard area, from where it was speedily booted clear.

Branton saved the situation when Riddick laid on a chance for the nippy Smillie, and from the clearance French was sent away in promising style, but he hit his centre far too hard and high, and it went out of play.

A quarter of an hour left now, and to say that the Town and their supporters were becoming anxious was just about the understatement of the year.

FOULED

The referee saw nothing wrong in a tackle by Green that left French flat on his face, three or four yards outside the penalty area, but there was no question in my mind that it was a foul.

John Simpson was coming in for some rough treatment when being challenged in dealing with high balls, but he certainly could not complain of lack of protection from the referee.

Gillingham kept breaking away, and in one of these sorties Riddick shot over, after which Smillie sparked off another raid which ended with Bailey caught offside.

Then came the somewhat belated announcement that Plymouth were beating Swindon 1-0, which was just about the most cheering bit of

the news the crowd had had this afternoon.

At least, it gave them something to shout about. Then Moore and Yeo got at cross purposes, and both were spoken to by the referee after a bargaining

How the goals came

YEO for Gillingham after 44 minutes.

SHEFFIELD for Luton after 82 minutes.

match. In fact, there was a lot of ill-temper about, and Riddick had to have some attention after being tackled by Lewis.

With the Town now pulling themselves together for a final rescue bid, Rioch was pulled down just outside the penalty area, which brought a free-kick, from which Lewis shot over.

MARKSMAN

Then with eight minutes left the Town at last scored with SHEFFIELD being the successful marksman. It came following a centre by French, who received the ball from a mis-cued clearance, and Sheffield shot through a crowd of players as he fell full-length.

Now the stage was set for a grandstand finish, if only the Town could raise their game, and a shot from Rioch got through the barrier, but went straight at John Simpson.

Next, Slough embarked on an ambitious run, which brought a corner, and the crowd was now firmly behind the Town.

BOBBED

Now the Town were all out in attack, and Gillingham had brought everybody back except Yeo. In stopping Lewis making a run down the left wing, Weston made a rugby-like tackle for which he was penalised, and the free-kick bobbed about in front of the goal until the ball was finally punted clear.

Still the Town were hammering away for the winner, but they were finding most of the gaps closed, as Rioch discovered when he tried to find a way through.

With the game almost over, Moore made a run down the left wing, only to finish disappointingly by putting the ball behind.

Then in a break to the other end Smillie worked out a neat opening for Terry Simpson, whose finish was weak.