

Halifax end that 100 per cent record then: Luton bid £25,000 for defender

LUTON TOWN lost their 100 per cent League record at home to Halifax last night — and then put in a £25,000 bid for the Halifax centre-half — Chris Nicholl.

Terms have been agreed, and the deal will almost certainly go through. Nicholl was having a chat with his father and his girl friend today, and letting Luton manager Alec Stock know his decision.

Nicholl played a big part for Halifax as they toiled to win a point. He beat the Luton attack all evening in the air, and impressed with his covering.

Mr Stock and secretary Bob Readhead were travelling north to finalise the deal after an expected telephone call from Nicholl. Then Mr Readhead planned to travel to Luton to register Nicholl as a Luton player — so

LUTON TOWN 1 HALIFAX 1 By ROGER DUCKWORTH

he would be eligible to play at Gillingham on Saturday.

Nicholl joined Halifax last season from Witton Albion, a Cheshire League side. He cost manager Alan Ball £750. He turned out in 39 League matches last term, and scored three goals.

After the talking had finished, Mr Ball told me: "This is our loss. This lad will play for England. I have said so in the Press and on television. He is the best covering centre half in England."

This pre-midnight deal was the most exciting thing that happened at Kenilworth Road last night — apart from Malcolm Macdonald's goal for the Town.

Suspect

Luton's defence needs tightening. Last night it looked suspect.

England and West Ham star Geoff Hurst watched the match — and rated Halifax the better side.

He said: "I was sent on a spying mission by my boss. We all do it from time to time. Mr Greenwood asked me to come down here and have a look.

"I quite enjoyed it, but if I had to choose which side I would like West Ham to meet in the next round of a Cup competition, I would choose Luton. Halifax impressed me."

West Ham meet Halifax in the next round of the League Cup.

No pattern

They impressed me too — and that's something Luton didn't do. They started well, but faded as fast as the evening light in the drizzle. This match lacked everything that was present in the fighting victory on Saturday. It was one of those forgettable nights — easily forgettable.

It was a match from which I could conceive no pattern. It was nigh impossible to work out to what system Luton were playing.

Yet it started so brightly. Inside half a minute Graham French went close, and then Keith Allen's header almost skidded into the net. After five minutes Allen saw a shot well pushed over for a Lewis corner from the right, and from this Luton went ahead.

Lewis swung the ball perfectly into the path of the



KENILWORTH ROAD, 11pm. Luton Town manager Alec Stock (left) and Halifax manager Alan Ball in earnest discussion over the proposed transfer of centre-half Chris Nicholl (centre) to Luton

well-positioned MacDonald who rose like a helicopter above the ball-and-chained defence to power a header into the top right hand corner.

Apart from their centre-half, this was the only thing Halifax were to give away. French was Luton's best forward, and he laid on chances for Allen and Collins before Hill scored a cracking equaliser for the Tykes.

What role Collins was playing was not exactly clear.

And Mike Keen, captain for the night in the absence of Terry Branston, did not have a happy time. It seems to me that Collins and Keen play for each other, and when one is off touch, the other suffers.

Errors

At centre-half Alan Slough covered a lot of ground, but was not so dominating as he can be. And John Moore committed some grave errors — but at

least gave honest endeavour — and was always ready to have a shot.

I made Jack Bannister the best defender.

Read did well enough in goal, having no chance with the Halifax equaliser.

Too late

It was Ryan who helped Halifax to score. He nodded a long-throw attempt across the penalty area, and from near the edge of the box, former England international Freddie Hill blasted the ball into the roof of the net. But why the Luton defence was retreating from him instead of racing forward to block his shot, remains a mystery.

Macdonald led the attack with vigour — in the number eight shirt. But in spite of the crowd's apparent love for him Brian Lewis had a night when little went right. Luton were right in replacing him with

Laurie Sheffield 12 minutes from the end.

But by then it was too late to redeem anything from the ashes of this Luton performance. Allen gave his usual effort, but it was lack of luck rather than lack of effort that upset Luton.

But their one point still puts them on the top of the Third Division table.

Luton Town: Read; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Slough, Moore; Collins, Macdonald, Lewis (Sheffield), Allen, French.

Halifax: Smith; Wallace, Burgin; Pickering, Nicholl, Robertson; Ryden (Shawcross), Lennard, Lawther, Hill, McCarthy.

Referee — Mr R. Spittle (Gt Yarmouth).

Attendance — 13,759.

TOP SIX

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Luton Town	4	3	1	0	8	3	7
Barnsley	4	3	1	0	9	6	7
Tranmere R	3	3	0	0	9	1	6
Bristol R	4	2	2	0	11	5	6
Orient	4	2	1	1	7	4	5
Bury	4	2	1	1	8	7	5