

TOUGH - AND IT WILL GET TOUGHER!

69/70

WITH A QUARTER of their Third Division matches played, Luton have already collected a third of the points necessary for almost certain promotion. That is the most important fact to emerge from a most dull and unexciting match in front of the biggest home League crowd of the season at Luton on Saturday.

But Luton cannot really be blamed for failing to provide the fans with their money's worth. Lowly Stockport decided to play a spoiling game — and they did it to good effect.

Afterwards their manager, Walter Galbraith, told me: "Blot out French and Tees. That's what I told the lads. And I thought they did a good job of it. But we were below strength, and I had to play full backs in my attack, so we were never really in with much of an idea of attacking."

That's fine Mr Galbraith. But these sort of tactics are ruining football as a spectacle. When you are next to the bottom and with only 12 fit players on your books, you can be excused for getting a bit desperate. But it's a good habit to grow out of.

The result was that Luton found the going pretty rough. They were fouled almost 30 times — and that's a lot in 90 minutes. And Stockport packed their defence with eight or nine men as soon as Luton looked like getting anywhere.

This is why the Town are playing far superior football away from home. A team can play only as well as it is allowed, and teams come to Luton these days not with the intention of winning, but with the avowed intent of not losing.

Happy

I can't see any end to it, either. The only side to chance their arm at Kenilworth Road this season were Bristol Rovers. They provided splendid entertainment — and lost 4-0. There's your answer!

Despite all this, Alec Stock, the Luton manager, is happy enough. "I'd sooner play badly and win than the other way round," he said. "You don't earn any medals for playing brilliantly and losing."

In the end Luton had to secure both points with a goal

**LUTON TOWN 2
STOCKPORT CO 0**
**By ROGER
DUCKWORTH**

by centre half Chris Nicholl from a corner, and a second-half Macdonald penalty. It's not too satisfactory a way to beat the strugglers. On the other hand Luton, frustrated by the northerners' outlook towards the match, gave an honest performance.

Tees shines

Whenever Stockport won possession they fiddled about with a series of short passes in the middle of the field. It got them nowhere. When Luton got the ball they did at least try to be adventurous — if it didn't often come off. There are few paths through a penalty area packed with nine defenders, and cluttered with one or two of your own men too.

Matt Tees, again bruised and battered, was Luton's outstanding forward. Had luck run a little bit in his direction he would have had a hat-trick. Three times he only had goalkeeper Ogley to beat, and was foiled by super-saves.

Keen carved some nice openings, and it was he who started the move which brought Luton's first goal. His teasing centre won a corner, which was taken by French. There was a deal of shoving and pushing in the goalmouth and Ogley, who had such a good match, failed to gather the ball. It dropped invitingly in the middle of the goalmouth, and Nicholl hooked it home.

Luton's fans had to wait until the 61st minute for the second. Chasing a Macdonald

pass, Tees was tripped inside the area by Goodwin. Leading goalscorer Macdonald had to wait a full minute before taking the kick, while Tees had treatment. Then he pushed it home expertly for his ninth goal of the season.

During the match there was some trouble from the Oak Road end where some brainless individual was showing off to his mates by tossing lighted fireworks into the goalmouth. A pity he wasn't caught. I can think of a good place to put him on bonfire night.

Three clear

Fireworks or not, Luton are now three points clear at the top. Tomorrow they entertain Bournemouth, the side they beat 1-0 at the seaside in August. Usually among the leaders, Bournemouth have had a shocking start, losing regularly both home and away. They are right down in the danger zone, four places from the bottom of the table.

But again Luton can expect a tough match. Freddie Cox's team will be coming to Luton with the express purpose of taking a point. They could well prove to be another tough nut. One of these days Luton are going to lose that unbeaten home record, and it will more than likely be a badly-placed side that trip them up.

Luton should be at full strength for the match. There were plenty of bruises from Saturday, and some sore feet due to the hardness of the pitch.

Competent

On Saturday the defence played well with Nicholl, Slough, Jardine and Bannister doing a splendid job as the last line of resistance. Behind them Sandy Davie did not have a great deal to do, but he dealt competently with the little that was thrown at him — mostly long-range stuff.

In midfield Allen lacked a bit of his usual authority in the first half, but came back in the second, and Keen set-up some interesting moves with astute passes and clever changing of direction. Once or twice his passing was off target, but he attempts balls that most players would not. Most of them find their man.

French and Macdonald were closely watched, but still had plenty of ambition. Collins obviously found the close-marking annoying, and several times had to progress backwards — if you know what I mean — to find room in which to operate. This is another legacy of the packed defence system — it's confusing and balking to everyone.

We can be sure Bournemouth will employ a similar system.

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Jardine, Bannister; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Collins, Macdonald, Tees, Allen. French. Sub: Sheffield.

STOCKPORT COUNTY: Ogley; Haydock, Hartle; Goodwin, Campbell, Low; Price, Chapman, Rowlands, Bebbington, Morton. Sub: Griffith.

REFEREE: Mr T. H. C. Reynolds (Swansea).
ATTENDANCE: 15,944.