

Penalty goal spurred the Town

ERIC PUGH reports from Millmoor

FOR MANY years I have been coming to the somewhat austere Rotherham ground, and I cannot recall seeing the pitch so well grassed. Just as well in view of the lack of rain, and there is no doubt that the present hard going is producing more strains and stresses on players than is normal at this stage of the season.

However the Town's injury position is reasonably happy, and they were able to field an unchanged team with John Collins playing with five stitches still in a gash in his forehead.

As in the last away match, former Cambridge Blue Peter Phillips was substitute. Laurie Sheffield, who made a highly successful debut for Doncaster at Walsall last night, and scored, was here to greet his former colleagues.

He told me that he is very happy about the move which cuts out the considerable travelling to which he has been subjected while on the Town's books, while living in Doncaster.

For Rotherham this has been a depressing start to the season, partly due to injuries, and they were still looking for their first home win since the opening match of the season.

However, their draw at Reading last week increased their confidence, and they relied on the same team, with David Lill, new signing from Hull City, making his debut before the home crowd.

Once again, the Town's specially chartered train was full, which meant that along with those who came by road the following was between 500 and 600. Even so, the crowd at the start was on the thin side.

The first incident was a foul by Collins on Warnock, but Bentley's free-kick was placed within easy reach of

TEAMS

ROTHERHAM UTD.: Furnell; Mealand, Leigh; Hague, Watson, Hudson; Lill, Fantham, Downes, Bentley, Warnock. Substitute: Womble.

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Collins, MacDonald, Tees, Allen, French. Substitute: Phillips.

Referee: A. Bone, Grangetown, Sunderland.

Davie, who cut the ball out without trouble.

Then came a quite amazing incident when in the course of a run down the right wing, Downes blatantly fouled Slough twice. There was no reaction at all from the referee, and in the end Fantham's shot was deflected for a corner.

Slowly the Town settled down and there was some juggling by French, out on the left wing, only for his centre to be cut out by Furnell.

When Rotherham came back, Davie, emerging quickly from his goal, saved a dangerous situation by whipping the ball away from Fantham and Downes, after Bentley had set up a great chance for Warnock.

Rotherham were looking the more dangerous and from a free-kick for a foul by Nicholl on Downes, Davie

made a tremendous save under the bar as Lill hit it full flooded from 25 yards.

So far the Town were on the receiving end, but they kept breaking into attack, with Tees taking much of the weight. There was a free-kick midway in the Rotherham half, which Bannister placed well, only for Watson to get up above Tees, and from the clearance there was a free-kick against Nicholl.

There was a tense moment for Rotherham when Tees was scythed down, and Bannister and French collaborated with the free-kick, French made an accurate centre which Furnell, with the utmost difficulty picked off the head of Tees, who would have been a certain scorer if the goalkeeper missed it.

DANGEROUS

When the Town did get on to the attack they were dangerous, and Keith Allen nearly forced the ball past Furnell when Tees headed on a corner from French.

The first 20 minutes were not particularly inspiring, but the Town were obviously doing what they set out to accomplish — containing the opposition.

The next Town attack was sparked off when French cleverly headed inside a rather wild pass by Keen, and this had the effect of giving the Town a corner on the right, and taking some of the pressure off the defence.

From this, taken by French, Allen headed the ball from point blank range and was un-

fortunate to find Watson directly in the line of flight. In fact, Rotherham were looking quite vulnerable in defence under pressure.

When play swung to the other end a possible chance was missed by Downes, though admittedly the ball came across sharply.

A couple of sharp raids by the Town were both brought to a premature end by Furnell, first from a header by MacDonald, and then following a cross by Ryan who was joining the attack with some effect.

Brilliant work by Tees kept the Town on to the attack, and when he back-heeled French was fouled by Mealand, but the winger's finishing was not too accurate yet, and he wasted the free kick.

DEFENSIVE

Basically this was a defensive battle, the Town were fighting, and yet there had been few real threats to their equality. Bannister under pressure was forced to concede a corner from which Davie was impeded, and that was the end of that particular thrust.

Rotherham gained a free-kick when Allen brought down Fantham, and the Town brought everyone back. Hudson's kick came over, and Allen handled the ball inside the penalty area, which brought a prompt award of a spot-kick.

Allen claimed he had been pushed on to the ball, and that the handling was inadvertent, but the referee would have none of it, and LEIGH gave Davie no chance with a rising shot into the roof of the net to put Rotherham one up after 42 minutes.

Maybe Allen had a case, but to me it looked completely unnecessary. Stung by this, the Town came back, but all that happened were injuries to Tees and Lealand, both of whom required attention before resuming.

Half-time:

ROTHERHAM 1
LUTON 0

It had not been a particularly impressive first-half display by the Town, but at the same time they could regard themselves as unlucky to be in arrears from what could only be regarded as a controversial penalty decision. From the restart they sought to mend the situation, and MacDonald shooting on the turn, saw the ball stopped on the line by Mealand, with Furnell beaten.

Rotherham had switched wingers, and immediately Warnock was dangerous with

a run that was checked by Slough, giving away a corner.

With eight minutes of rather aimless football in the second half gone, Rotherham introduced their substitute, Womble, for Mealand, who had a distinct limp, which caused a re-shuffle, with Hague dropping to right-back.

Perhaps the disorganisation worried Rotherham more than it should have done, because the Town gained two consecutive corners on the right, from the second of which they equalised.

The second attempt by French came across most accurately and ALLEN was on the spot to get in before Furnell and head the ball firmly into the back of the net, to put the Town level after 56 minutes.

So justice was served, because there was still this query hanging over the penalty that had been conceded.

Immediately after this there was a real scare at the Town end when everyone missed a cross from the right, including Davie, and the ball finally ran to the other touchline.

DIFFICULTY

When Downes was all right again, there was a free-kick to Rotherham on the left, which was caught by Davie with some difficulty, and in this incident Tees, who had again taken a lot of punishment, was hurt again.

Much of the play after this was inconsequential until Bannister fouled Warnock, which brought a free-kick in a dangerous position. But Nicholl headed clear, but there was a quick return from Watson to Warnock, whose cross-shot just missed the far post.

The Town's goal seemed to deflate Rotherham, who were not showing the flair in attack that had been glimpsed occasionally in the first half. Or maybe it was the effect of the Town defence tightening up.

All of a sudden the game sparked into life again when Warnock suddenly swept the ball across the Womble who rather snatched his shot, which went straight at Davie.

Then Womble had another chance when Davie, trying to find Ryan from a goal-kick, placed the ball straight at his feet, and when it came across it needed a late intervention by Slough to retrieve the situation.

Injuries continued, with Bannister the next casualty, but he was able to continue. Then Davie was in action again, saving a header from Warnock.

Now there seemed no real threat to the Town, who were carrying the fight to Rotherham, albeit not very effectively, but all the same keeping the ball at the right end.

There followed a period which can best be described as "niggling," with petty fouls occurring, and Hague had his name taken for a foul on French. Not that the free-kick availed the Town much, because the end product was a speculative shot by Collins that reached Furnell first bounce.

Play had degenerated into a near shambles, with Rotherham apparently losing all their former constructive ability and being easily contained by the Town defence, as they sought to make progress with big kicks down the middle.

In a late rally, Rotherham launched a heavy raid in

How the goals came

LEIGH (pen.) for Rotherham after 42 mins.

ALLEN for Luton after 56 minutes.

which Leigh, right on the attack, hit into Davie's hands a cross by Lill.

The crowd were streaming out now—a sure sign that they had not much faith in Rotherham's ability to regain the lead. It certainly looked that way.

Now Leigh was coming through frequently in an effort to snatch a winner, but was forstalled by Davie diving at his feet.

There was a certain amount of time-wasting by the Town defence, which was not pleasing what remained of the home fans, but in any case this half had already lasted two minutes beyond its allotted span.

With play going on, French suddenly flashed into the picture with a cross to Collins, whose close-range shot was deflected for a corner.

And that corner very nearly brought a dramatic winner, because Furnell, unaccountably, failed to cut it out, and there was Tees behind him to head the ball downwards, only for Hague to clear off the line. Result:

ROTHERHAM 1
LUTON TOWN 1