

Town find the going tough

By ERIC PUGH

THIS WAS a significant day for football in that for the first time referees and linesmen have been instructed to visit the dressing rooms of both teams before the start.

In the League directive they have been told to ensure that all players are aware of the contents of a notice issued recently for the guidance of players.

They are also required to explain any points on which the players have doubts. Before the start of the Town's vital match with Rochdale, both managers welcomed this move.

Said Alec Stock: "I am completely in favour of it, and it has been common practice on the Continent for some time. How else can you improve relations other than by getting together?"

FITNESS

Although Chris Nicholl is approaching complete fitness, and will be ready if required for the home match with Fulham on Tuesday, the Town kept the team that knocked Bournemouth out of the Cup.

Despite their disappointment at losing at Workington last Saturday, Rochdale were also unchanged.

There was a dangerous early raid by the Town, attacking the Kenilworth Road end, when Ryan came through strongly, but no-one was on hand to reach his low cross.

Rochdale's first shot came from Butler, but he did not cause Davie any undue difficulty.

Maintaining their bright start, the Town gained a corner through the persistence of Keen, but Harker pulled it down in the face of a challenge by MacDonald.

It was nearly first blood to Rochdale when Whitehead came in, lifted the ball past Davie, and Branston fortunately was in position to hook it away from danger.

As good a chance as there had been so far fell to Tees, following clever work and a centre by French, but the centre-forward was completely on the wrong angle with his header.

FREE-KICKS

Although there was nothing even vaguely approaching viciousness in the play, there was an unusual number of free-kicks in the opening phase.

Slowly the Town settled down and threatened to take command, without being able to trouble Harker seriously, and certainly the first quarter of an hour had done little to underline the scoring potential of these two teams.

DEFLECT

At least Rochdale were managing to hit the ball on target when they had a shot at goal. Rochdale hit back and Whitehead had a chance spoiled for him when Collins got a foot to his drive and deflected it over the top.

This was followed by two corners to Rochdale, the second of which Davie punched out somewhat sketchily, and in the end it was Allen who relieved pressure by belting the ball out of play.

For a time the Town were forced back strictly on the defensive, and there were occasions when they did not look completely assured.

The Rochdale pressure continued, and it was as well that Branston stepped in quickly to concede a corner as sharpshooter Jenkins found himself in an open space.

Then there was a quick break by the Town, during which MacDonald swept a centre by French into the net, but the goal was disallowed.

There had been some flag waving by the linesman as French gained possession, but the referee waved on play, but as MacDonald beat Harker he signalled a free-kick, presumably for offside.

ANXIOUS

Then the Town had a bit of luck when Butler, receiving a pass from Jenkins, beat Davie with a shot that came back into play off a post and Branston relieved the immediate anxiety by banging the ball out.

Things were certainly not going right for the Town at this stage, with the defence uncertain under pressure, and the forwards being guilty of some misjudged passes.

Again the Town attack was operating with only one-winger, Graham French, with Collins mostly playing in the inside-left position.

All Harker had to do for some time was to field a long

shot by Ryan, and Rochdale were certainly looking the more dangerous in front of goal.

Rochdale continued to look more likely to get goals, and Davie just managed to put over a header by Buck from a long cross by Ashworth.

At last the Town swung into action with something like the verve of which we know they are capable, with MacDonald sending away French. Tees dived at his centre but he hit the ball straight at Harker, and was then penalised for offside.

STRUGGLE

At the moment it was a case of the Town struggling to keep on level terms, and Davie made a diving save from a header by Ashworth, who beat Branston to the ball as it came across from a corner.

Strikers MacDonald and Tees were being held comfortably, and the only real threat from the Town was coming when French was sent away with a clear run.

Rochdale were still moving the ball about smartly and generally more accurately than the Town.

MacDonald was caught in possession by Smith as he tried to fasten on to a through pass, and this time it was a corner on the left.

Before this could be taken there was a hold-up while Keen had attention for a leg injury which did not seem to be serious.

When Rochdale swung back again into attack Rudd gained a corner off Allen, and from this Whitehead shot over.

Half-time:

LUTON	0
ROCHDALE	0

I fancy the Town's reaction at half time would be a measure of relief that they were still on level terms against this immensely fit and very able Rochdale team, who at times had given them something of a run around.

First move of the second half came from Rochdale, who had a free kick out near the corner flag that Whitehead placed well, and Slough was glad to head behind for safety.

For a time Rochdale held

the initiative, and they certainly should have gone ahead when Jenkins was left with a great chance only about 10 yards from goal, but shot too high.

A foul by Leech on Allen gave the Town a chance to make some ground, but there was still little sign of penetration in their attack.

There were appeals for a penalty when Allen went headlong as he sought a scoring opening, but the referee would have none of their claims.

CHANTING

Now with five minutes or so of the second half gone, a section of the crowd began chanting, "Harrison!" and it was taken up in other parts of the ground.

Certainly it seemed a move that might be made with benefit soon. Meanwhile Allen was playing a greater role in attack than had previously been the case, and he had a point-blank header from a centre by French deflected over the top.

Whether by accident or intent, French stayed over on the right wing after taking a corner there and certainly the method the Town had adopted had made them very thin on that flank.

There was a touch-and-go effort in front of the Rochdale goal from a centre by French, at which both MacDonald and Tees had a swing, had their shots blocked, and finally Collins came up to send the ball much too high.

SWINGING

There was another close call for the Town when Davie and Jenkins went up together for a swinging centre by Rudd, and it looked as the ball hung tantalisingly and finally dropped just over the bar that Davie had got the last touch at it. However, the referee gave a goal-kick.

Again Rochdale were producing trouble for the Town defence, and Buck shot just wide with Davie scrambling across his goal.

French was now back on the left wing. And again the chant of "Harrison!" broke out.

TEAMS

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

ROCHDALE: Harker; Smith, Ryder; Leech, Parry, Ashworth; Whitehead, Rudd, Buck, Jenkins, Butler. Substitute: Clarke.

Referee: Mr. C. Thomas, of Treorchy.

As the Town gathered their forces again there came two distinct chances. MacDonald was concerned in each, and at the end of the first Allen got a shot through, but it went straight at Harker. Then MacDonald swept the ball across the face of the goal, but Tees, coming up at speed, failed to connect.

LUCKY

Not for the first time the Town were in luck when the dangerous Butler raced on to a through pass by Rudd and his low drive looked booked for the far corner of the net until it struck a defender and was deflected for a corner.

That could so easily have

How the goals came

COLLINS for Luton after 75 minutes

ALLEN for Luton after 86 minutes.

been a decisive goal but the Town were able to breathe again, and in an attack sparked off by French, MacDonald was twice stopped as he sought to find a clear opening.

After this there was a show of more determination by the Town forwards, and when Allen lifted the ball into the penalty area, MacDonald swung it into the roof of the net, but seconds after the whistle had gone for offside.

MacDonald then beat the ground in anguish when he was pulled down and fell just inside the penalty area as two defenders converged on him. Optimistically, the Town looked for a penalty, but the referee waved on play. Then there was a foul by Branston and the free kick brought added pressure on the Town goal.

DANGER

There was danger for Rochdale when French swung across a brilliant centre that Ashworth headed away. The shouts for Harrison had now reached a crescendo and there were cheers when it was seen that he was warming up on the touchline.

Meanwhile, Rochdale struck again, and Ryan slid across quickly to give away a corner from a low centre by Whitehead.

Quite the best effort for the Town for some time came from Collins, who picked up a loose ball just outside the penalty area and let rip a rising drive that Harker just managed to finger-tip over the top.

The corner was the means of the Town keeping on the attack and finally Ryan came right through to make quite a worthy effort, with the ball finishing perhaps a couple of feet wide of the far post.

Then with 16 minutes left, Harrison came on, to be immediately waved off by the referee, until it was clear who he was replacing. In fact, the unlucky one was MacDonald, who gave Harrison an encouraging pat as he passed him.

This of course meant that they were now functioning on two wings with Allen up front.

SUCCESS

Immediately there came success, not that Harrison had anything to do with it, because it was Keen who made a through pass on to which COLLINS ran and made no mistake about putting the Town ahead with a well-placed shot after 75 minutes.

Several attempts by Rochdale were thrown back before Harrison produced a burst of speed and a centre which Allen headed downwards without effect.

There was nearly another goal when French, now beginning to enjoy himself on the right, made a low cross that Allen all but forced home.

Then with four minutes left came the knockout blow for Rochdale, when

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ALLEN headed the ball over the head of Harker, who had come out to try to intercept a header from Tees.