

ERIC PUGH'S VERDICT

LATE GOALS

SAVE THE

TOWN

LUTON TOWN 2, ROCHDALE 0

FOR 75 minutes at Kenilworth Road this afternoon goal-less stalemate existed in the vital top of the table battle between the Town and Rochdale. Then the Town changed their tactical plan by throwing in Mike Harrison for Malcolm MacDonald.

Although the goal that came a minute later could not be attributed directly to this change, it might have had a psychological effect.

At least the fact that the Town were employing two orthodox wingers might have caused the Rochdale defence to be stretched, and thus open up a gap.

At least, John Collins knew what to do about the chance when it came his way a quarter of an hour from the end, and he made no bones about placing the ball wide of Harker for his third goal in consecutive matches.

Collins has his detractors but he has certainly scored some invaluable goals for the Town, and today's took his total into double figures.

Until they took this late lead the Town had been struggling, and a win by two nothing had seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility.

Rochdale, who had created the better openings, had been unlucky at times, but were also guilty of some bad misses.

So well organised were they that it looked until this late thrust that the best the Town could hope for was yet another draw.

What happened then must certainly give added backing to those who have been advocating that in home matches the Town should have two orthodox raiding wingers.

For far too long this afternoon they were trying to make ground almost solely down the left flank or through the middle, and the fact that there was no outside-right meant that Ryder was given a good deal of freedom to come through and aid the attack.

When he found French facing him in the closing stages, it was a different story altogether, and the Rochdale rearguard was really stretched to its fullest extent for the first time.

For much of the first half the Town's running off the ball was unimpressive, and the strikers, MacDonald and Tees, were very blunt spearheads, indeed.

Both found themselves smothered by the hard tackling of the Rochdale defenders, and although one could have a certain amount of sympathy with them, in that the methods employed did not afford them the best of support, it was noticeable that MacDonald particularly took a long time to get the ball under control.

In the circumstances it was not all that surprising that he was the one to make way for Harrison, and that had the effect of casting Allen in the role of striker, a change which he celebrated by delivering the killer blow, with a goal four minutes from time.

So, there it was, a clear-cut victory which seemed highly unlikely at one time, and one could not help but sympathise with Rochdale, who played so well.

I would not say that the Town defence was exactly at its best this afternoon, but they got through somehow, with Bannister and Slough again prominent.

Continuing at Nicholl's deputy, Branston did not give Buck much scope.

At the same time, credit them with the determination to play open football, which produced an entertaining game for a crowd of 15,876.