

NEITHER DESERVED DEFEAT IN ORIENT SPECTACULAR

ORIENT 1, LUTON TOWN 0

69/70

IN ankle-deep mud that would have tested the stamina of a horse, these two worthy contenders for promotion put on a Boxing Day spectacular before Orient's biggest crowd of the season, 17,619.

Afterwards, there was universal praise for the thriller these teams produced, packed with incident and excitement, and fairly tacit agreement that neither deserved to lose.

Remarks like, "a credit to professional football, and to the Third Division" were being freely made by hard-bitten types who do not usually go into raptures.

But it was the sort of hard-fought, fast, sporting encounter that typified the least there is in the game.

That the Town were desperately unlucky to be beaten by the only goal, there can be little room for argument, but they earned more praise in defeat than they have for some victories this season.

For much of the first half they had to struggle to contain the fast-moving Orient outfit, and went behind in somewhat unlucky fashion in the eighth minute.

A corner was not cleared and, as Keith Allen sought to rectify the omission, PETER ALLEN stuck in a foot and the ball shot into the roof of the net at such a pace that Davie could scarcely have seen it.

The trend of the game is well illustrated by the count of corners. In the first half, when Orient were kicking what is held to be the "easier way," Orient totted up five against one.

After the interval, when the Town went storming for an equaliser, the count was 7-1 in their favour.

So, the pattern of the game changed completely,

Unfortunately, Lewis failed to get into the game to any marked effect, and made little impact. Despite that the Town kept hammering away courageously without the slightest hint of a let-up — a tribute to their physical fitness.

Their really bad luck came in the last minute. There seemed to be an obvious case of a penalty for

By ERIC PUGH

and Orient spent much of the second period hanging on grimly, though they still contrived to break out dangerously at times.

They were unlucky to lose Harper, carried off with damaged knee ligaments three minutes from half-time, but his replacement, Fairbrother, a bundle of energy, certainly did not let the side down.

Hero

The man who finally stood between the Town and the point they so badly needed, however, was goalkeeper Goddard. In the first half, he did well to keep out a header from MacDonald, and three times in 10 minutes after the interval, he stood between MacDonald and the goal he so richly deserved for all his determination and endeavour.

Playing in his first full league game for the Town, the former amateur international Peter Phillips could scarcely have had a more testing occasion.

However, his speed sometimes worried Mancini, especially as he began to seek the open space on the right wing. Certainly it was no reflection on him when he was called off after 66 minutes in favour of Lewis.

At that stage the need for a goal was becoming desperate and the line of thought, obviously, was that the experience of Lewis might just tilt the scale.

hands when the Orient had got themselves into unaccustomed difficulty following a corner.

Referee Gordon Hill, who by the way, kept play flowing splendidly in these bad conditions, turned down appeals, and in seconds the epic struggle was over.

Strong man of the Town undoubtedly was Nicholl, who ploughed through the mud ceaselessly, even joining in the attack during the second half onslaught.

Next to him I put Bannister for his immaculate covering, while Ryan's forthright thumping of the ball was also invaluable and Slough was particularly hard in the tackle.

Non-stop

Keith Allen, of course, was a real motion itself, and Collins ran himself into the ground, though with rather less effect. Even though he too never stopped, Keen could not secure the necessary command in the middle of the field.

Whenever French gained possession there was a murmur of expectation from the Town faithful, but the going was against him and there were times when he was "chipping" the ball instead of stabbing it across.

ORIENT: Goddard; Jones, Rofe; Taylor, Mancini, Harper (Fairbrother); Lazarus, Bullock, Allen (P.).
LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; MacDonald, Collins, Phillips (Lewis), Allen (K.), French.
Referee: G. W. Hill, Leicester.