

NOT SO MUCH DEFEAT, BUT HUMILIATION

SHREWSBURY TOWN 5 LUTON TOWN 1

SHREWSBURY always seem to be able to put the Indian sign on the Town.

There are memories of a 7-2 defeat at Kenilworth Road and more recently a 3-1 drubbing on this muddy Gay Meadow pitch last season.

Not that this was so "Gay" for the Town today, because this afternoon's affair was not so much a defeat as a humiliation mostly brought about in the first 45 minutes.

At the same time, I have seldom seen a game take such a different, dramatic turn.

With such assurance did the Town begin that they could reasonably have been two up in the first ten minutes. During that period I thought they had shrugged off the Christmas hangover of defeats on consecutive days, and also the flu germ that succeeded them.

Just what effect the dual onset had I wouldn't even start to guess. The fact was, that once Shrewsbury took the lead in the 11th minute, there seemed to be little to offer.

Unaccustomed holes appeared in defence, the marking was quite literally shocking at times, and there was simply no command or domination in midfield.

Conditions were bad I know, but they were the same for both sides, and Shrewsbury exploited them by continually pushing the ball forward, combined with hard running and chasing.

Three goals in the first 28 minutes told their own story, which literally was the difference between the two teams.

At half-time, the Town were four down and they tried for the second half to plug some of the gaps by bringing in John Moore and leaving Mike Keen in the dressing room.

At that stage this could be regarded only as negative move, except that it gave Alan Slough the freedom in midfield that I would like to see him have more regularly.

ENCOURAGING

At least it went some way towards stopping the Shrewsbury goal rush, and there was a period when the Town came back into the game at 4-1 through Mike Harrison, who made an encouraging re-appearance in the team.

Certainly for me he was the most dangerous forward, but one goal was not enough to produce any thoughts of a complete revival.

To some extent the Town could plead a certain amount of bad luck, such as the header by Tees which stuck in the mud when a goal looked certain, and when Tooze, who proved a brave goalkeeper indeed, hung on to a shot by Allen.

However, on the whole the Town could not complain about their lot, because on the day there is no possible room for doubt that Shrewsbury were the sharper, faster, more intelligent moving team, and they certainly made the most of the opportunities they created.

It was a disappointing somewhat shabby performance by the Town, who in my estimation were outplayed in most departments.

The defence was too easily beaten, Nicholl in common with Keen had a bad first half, and Allen and Collins seemed to get no sort of grip on the middle of the field.

There was some last-ditch tackling by Ryan and Bannister which earned them credit, and frankly I could not fault Davie for the concession of five goals, which is only a little over a third of what the Town have conceded in 23 matches before this debacle.

In the end, the Town more or less limped off well beaten and the crowd of 4,206, mostly, of course, composed of Shrewsbury fans, had ample justification to roar off their heads in appreciation.