

Shrewsbury bang in four

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Eric Pugh reports from Gay Meadow

FOR THEIR first sample of serious football for a fortnight, the Town survived just about all the weather could contrive.

On Thursday the Shrewsbury pitch was unplayable because of frost and snow, yesterday the thaw must have presented some threat of waterlogging, and today the threat to the match was fog.

This for most of the Town's journey to Shrewsbury was persistent, sometimes thick and always patchy.

Happily though, when they arrived at Shrewsbury the whole of the pitch was visible, but the atmosphere was decidedly murky and it did not need a good deal of deterioration to cause thoughts about a possible abandonment.

The pitch had recovered well from its ill treatment by the weather, and although heavy and liable to cut up, it could be regarded as satisfactory for this time of the year.

All the flu victims of last week had recovered but a notable absentee was Graham French, who began his league career on this ground, but was prevented from playing by a persistent attack of bronchitis.

In his place was Mike Harrison, and the other change from the Christmas matches was that Matt Tees, recovered from tonsillitis, resumed for Peter Phillips.

Shrewsbury had Terry Harkin, the Irish international, back to lead their attack, and perform a double striker with George Andrews, who Luton had on their books when he was 18.

Because of the death of a Shrewsbury director, both teams wore black armbands and there was a minute's silence before play was off.

In the first minute, it

became only too plain how muddy this pitch was. Great ruts were torn on the surface as the Town made an initial attack down the right flank, and then when the ball eventually reached the middle Toozie slipped ungracefully on his back as he went to gather the ball.

OFF TARGET

Then came a narrow escape for Shrewsbury when Harrison made a long cross to the far post which presented Tees with at least a half-chance.

This time he went up, met the ball with his head, but was a bit off target, and Allen, following up, who in normal circumstances might have snapped up the opportunity, could not turn quickly enough.

Still the Town pressure continued and Allen gave Toozie quite a difficult task in saving a first-time shot, especially as the goalkeeper was already slithering.

The most difficult thing in this match was to turn with any alacrity and it looked certain that the outcome would be the result of who made the greater number of mistakes.

Definitely the Town were the superior side, and Toozie was in action again, and in some difficulty too, in clawing outside a full-blooded drive by Harrison.

Then the goalkeeper made a bad blunder from the corner, coming out optimistically and losing the ball to MacDonald, who shot for what was theoretically an open goal, but in the event was not, because of the necessary time lag in gaining a foothold.

In the end the shot went outside for a corner off Gregory's legs.

As good a chance as Shrewsbury had in this first ten minutes fell to Andrews following good work by Moir, but he snatched at it, shooting too hurriedly, understandable in the circumstances and the ball almost trickled at Davie.

LUTON REJECT

In the 11th minute there came a shock when Shrewsbury broke away to take the lead and ironically it was ANDREWS, the Luton reject, who did the trick.

Originally, there was an attempt to put Shrewsbury offside, but Nicholl was lying too far back.

So the attack went on, and Roberts swept across a low centre to which Andrews, moving quickly, beat Nicholl and left Davie groping at thin air with a low shot.

Thus encouraged, Shrewsbury put on pressure, and Davie had to go down somewhat unhappily to save a shot by Moir that slithered off the greasy surface. From the corner Andrews shot wide.

At this stage, the Town were in deep trouble. Their defence was looking unhappy, not very reliable, and with offside apparently again in the

background of their minds MacDonald came into what suddenly blossomed into a promising situation.

It looked dangerous until finally the Town got the offside decision that they had been looking for, but in my view it was pretty much a touch and go affair.

Gradually the Town came back into the game, though not with the same purpose they had shown in the opening stages and they were not bringing Toozie into serious action.

Some strange decisions affecting both teams were coming from the referee, and conditions were such that it would have been better if he had let play flow, and not interrupt it for marginal infringements.

BULLET

Then came the second blow to the Town after 24 minutes with a brilliant goal by MOIR.

It came from a strong Shrewsbury raid which left Andrews plastered in mud, lying injured. Play went on, and the ball, following some indecisive play, went out to

to in view of their unexpectedly good position.

But there could have been a cut in their lead when the Town made a sudden thrust through Bannister doing the overlap on the left wing. But his centre, though eluding Toozie, was cut off by the Shrewsbury defensive covering which was superior to the Town's.

Now rain was falling which caused the somewhat sparse crowd to seek the protection of cover.

There was a stoppage while Andrews received further attention, and in fact was off the field for a minute or so. In the interim, MacDonald, who had taken over from him as striker took further advantage of the sluggishness of the Town and brought the best out of Davie who made a flying save.

Again Shrewsbury showed their command of the situation when Harkin roared in from the left wing and the mud-plastered Davie went down for another dose of that particularly clinging material to cut out the centre at the second attempt.

Shrewsbury did not let up. They were altogether sharper than the Town and their attacks carried continual menace.

SCRAMBLE

With two minutes left to half-time, the Town went further in arrears during what can best be described as a hectic scramble in front of goal.

The goal stemmed from a corner by Roberts that was never cleared, and in fact a shot was stopped on the goal-



Mike Harrison with a full-blooded drive in the early stages of the match had Shrewsbury's goalkeeper Toozie busy clawing the ball outside.

Moir. From 25 yards he hit the ball like a bullet and it ended in the corner of the net completely beating Davie's dive.

Certainly Shrewsbury had taught the Town a lesson of how to accept the half-chance, and there was altogether more sharpness and thrust about their attack.

This was now threatening to become a massacre, because in the 28th minute the Town became three down.

The scorer this time was McLAUGHLIN. He capped a movement which began with a long run which Andrews started and Harkin carried on.

There was a half clearance by Bannister I think, but whatever happened Davie was left completely stranded as MacDonald hit in his final shot with unerring accuracy.

Now the Town were trying to rescue something from what had become a shambles, and it was not difficult to pinpoint the reason—bad marking. There was no command in midfield or any threat in attack, apart from occasional thrusts by Harrison.

Shrewsbury were still looking the more purposeful, as, of course, they were entitled

TEAMS

SHREWSBURY TOWN: Toozie; Gregory, Fellows; Moore, Wood, Moir; Roberts, Bridgwood, Harkin, Andrews, McLaughlin. Substitute: Hawkins.

LUTON TOWN: Davie; Ryan, Bannister; Keen, Nicholl, Slough; Collins, McDonald, Tees, Allen, Harrison. Substitute: Moore.

Referee: J. E. Thacker, of Scarborough.

line by Bannister in circumstances which Shrewsbury held justified a penalty for hands.

It did not come, and from their point of view it did not matter because the ball went out to MOIR who calmly slotted the ball home with the Town defence again looking somewhat bemused. Half-time:

SHREWSBURY T. ... 4
LUTON TOWN 0

Obviously something drastic had to be done and it was, within the limits available.

For the start of the second half, on came John Moore to try to reinforce the back four, which pushed Alan Slough up into midfield and meant that Keen stayed in the dressing room.

This seemed logical enough but there was so much leeway to make up that there could scarcely be hope of radical improvement.

At the same time, the Town came into it as an attacking force with Bannister coming right up front and being pulled up for offside somewhat late as he hammered the ball at Toozie.

With the pitch cutting up badly now, there was not much fluidity about the play and Shrewsbury suffered succession of injuries to first Moir and then Harrison.

LOOSE BALL

Then in the 59th minute came the first sign of a reprieve for the Town when HARRISON scored.

Shrewsbury seemed to have escaped a particularly dire situation when Toozie made a wonderful save at point-blank range from MacDonald.

However, he could not hang on to the ball, which ran loose and Harrison was on hand to slip the ball just inside the near post before the home defence could cover.

This was better, but there was still a very long way to go, and frankly the Town attack were not promising to produce much more than the meagre output they had attained.

At the same time there was more hard running up front than there had been, and Toozie again made a brave save, throwing himself at the feet of Collins and conceding a corner in the process.

Before this was taken Moir, who had been a source of inspiration to Shrewsbury, partly because he had been given so much room in which to operate, was hurt again, and finally limped off.

The substitute was not introduced immediately and, meanwhile, Shrewsbury conceded another corner from which Tees hooked the ball just wide of the far post.

A little more accuracy, and that was asking a lot on this

How the goals came

ANDREWS for Shrewsbury after 11 minutes.
MOIR for Shrewsbury after 24 minutes.

McLAUGHLIN for Shrewsbury after 28 minutes.

MOIR for Shrewsbury after 43 minutes.

HARRISON for Luton after 59 minutes.

HARKIN for Shrewsbury after 76 minutes.

soaked pitch, could have given an interesting twist to this match.

In fact, with 25 minutes to go, Shrewsbury, who had still not brought on a substitute and were operating with ten men, were showing signs of panic in defence as the Town crowded on pressure.

This was relieved by Toozie coming out in commanding fashion to cut out a corner from Harrison.

Certainly at this stage, the Town was showing more fight and determination, but one had to try and assess just how much this resulted from the fact that Shrewsbury were a man short.

It seemed a strange decision not to bring themselves up to full strength despite the considerable role Moir had played.

FREE KICKS

There was a close thing when MacDonald all but intercepted a back pass only to be beaten by the brave Toozie and then Hawkins came on to bring Shrewsbury up to full strength.

With the Town back in the game, territorially at least, there were three free kicks to them in quick succession.

Nothing came of them because the Town forwards were showing a predilection for getting themselves caught offside.

Harrison continued to be the most dangerous Town forward and a cross by him was deflected by Gregory on to the top of the bar and went for a corner.

Allen took it and the ball landed on top of the bar again, only to be ruled that it had gone out of play in transit.

Now with time beginning to run short, the Town had pushed Allen up front, mainly on the right wing.

It looked as if Shrewsbury

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had survived what had seemed to be a distinctly sticky period, and they came back again to gain a corner on the left which just about settled any lingering doubts there might have been, and let me say they had been slender indeed, about the destination of these points.

ON TOP

It happened in the 76th minute when Roberts, taking a corner on the left wing, placed the ball unerringly and HARKIN went up above everybody else to head Shrewsbury's fifth goal. Cruel luck came for the



Town when Tees seemed certain to have headed a second goal from a centre by Harrison because Toozie was beaten completely, but the ball dropped heavily, stuck in the mud less than a foot from the line, and was hurriedly booted away by Fellows.