

Goal shock for Town

By ERIC PUGH

ATTACKING the Kenilworth Road end in their match against Mansfield this afternoon, the Town might have gained an early lead when MacDonald took advantage of some slackness by Boam in the opening minutes, gained possession, turned in for goal and Brown had to make a despairing but successful dive on to his line.

It was a miserable afternoon, damp and nasty, so that the crowd did not reach the level that was expected after the fine mid-week performance.

I should say the pitch was just about the heaviest it has been this season.

This was not altogether surprising in view of the fact that much of it had been covered by well over a foot of snow and it was not until yesterday morning that the last of it was removed.

The ground staff had done a remarkable job. There was never the slightest doubt, after Wednesday, that it would be playable.

Unfortunately, injuries received at Reading on Wednesday caused the Town to make two changes, with Branston and French having to stand down, making way for Harrison and Nicholl.

On the other hand, Mansfield had no such problems, and they included their new-comer McKenzie, on loan from Nottingham Forest, as substitute.

This looked like being a difficult game because the pitch was virtually dead. What was needed, was a good sharp shower to liven up the surface.

At the same time, the Town were looking more ambitious in these early stages and Harrison in full cry for goal was ruthlessly pulled down just outside the penalty area by Boam.

The free-kick could have been productive but wasn't, because MacDonald, closing, failed to gain control.

Then Tees cleverly sent away Harrison, whose centre was stopped by Waller against whom there were appeals for a penalty for hands but the only result was a corner which was cleared speedily.

CLOSE CALL

The Town were much the more dangerous, and Brown only just prevented MacDonald from giving them the lead when he made an acrobatic save, turning the ball over the top.

It was taking Mansfield

some time to get into the game as an attacking force, but they did so as play neared the quarter of an hour stage.

Roberts, who has something of a reputation as a goal-snatcher, placed a header from a centre by Tate just a foot wide of the post. But for all Davie knew about it it might just as well have been a foot inside.

The referee who is one of the reserves for the World Cup, shook an admonishing fist at Waller after he had unnecessarily driven the ball into the net when play had stopped while Davie was lying injured as the result of a collision.

There was a hold up while the goalkeeper recovered. He took the free-kick, though not very accurately.

It was still the Town looking the more impressive in their midfield build up, and the more thrustful in front of goal, where however, things were not going quite right for them.

Certainly, MacDonald was not getting a kind run of the ball at close quarters, otherwise he would have been in the list of scorers by now.

UNEXPECTED

Then, in the 23rd minute, the Town took the lead from an unexpected quarter, though there was some doubt, certainly in my mind about where the credit or debit should lie.

RYAN came through in the determined sort of style that has marked his play in recent matches and which brought him a similar sort of goal against Tranmere in the last home match.

Closing in, he hit an oblique shot that struck Walker, possibly sufficiently to put off Brown, but whether the deflection was sufficient to qualify it for an "own goal" I would not like to say.

In the circumstances, I am more inclined to give Ryan the benefit of the doubt.

Immediately afterwards, there could have been another because Harrison, who was showing lively form, pulled across a low centre that MacDonald just failed to reach. Then MacDonald missed a

post by inches from a similar sort of angle.

There could be no disputing the fact that the Town were the better organised, more dangerous side, and there had been little or no threat so far from Mansfield.

Such attacking efforts as Mansfield were managing were being contained comfortably enough, mainly as a result of good covering.

In the main, it was the Town doing more of the pressing and they certainly should have had a free-kick when Tees had his feet shot from under him by Tate.

THREAT

MacDonald still represented the main threat to Mansfield and Brown came out yards from his goal to dive at his feet as he sought to fasten on to a through pass.

Then there could have been another goal when Slough quickly took a free-kick which MacDonald pushed sideways for Collins.

His shot was inches wide from a position where I thought the inside-right should have made certain.

Slowness robbed Tees of a chance laid on for him beautifully by Collins. Another goal at this juncture would have been welcome even though there was no real sign that Mansfield had the forward power necessary to wipe out their present slender arrears.

Despite their ruggedness, the Mansfield defence was suspect under pressure with Brown far from happy in dealing with high balls.

He had the utmost difficulty in pushing over the bar a long range header by Slough.

As half-time neared, Moore was injured when fouled by Stenson, but made a quick recovery. Half-time:

LUTON 1
MANSFIELD 0

For the Town, the first half had been one mostly of missed opportunities.

They had created the openings, but had failed to accept enough to give them what should have been a decisive lead.

First threat of the second half came from them when Tees had a header pulled down from under the bar by Brown, and then Keen was only just wide from a centre by Slough.

UNEXPECTED

Then in the 51st minute the unexpected happened and Mansfield equalised through ROBERTS.

It came directly from a chance conceded somewhat recklessly by Keen, and from it the ball went to Stenson.

He made an accurate cross, and Roberts with his back half to the goal, met it on the volley to send the ball just under the bar, giving Davie no chance.

SHORT-LIVED

Mansfield's joy lasted for only two minutes which was all it took the Town to regain their lead.

HARRISON was the scorer, in cool fashion.

He placed the ball accurately into the vacant half of the net after the Mansfield defence had been drawn over to its left following a free kick for a foul by Walker.

It was a commendable effort by Harrison, who certainly kept his head in the crisis.

LEVEL AGAIN

The rush of goals, unlooked for in view of the happenings of the first half, continued, and in the 57th minute Mansfield were level for the second time.

It followed a free kick, well placed into the penalty area

TEAMS

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

MANSFIELD TOWN: Brown; Pate, Walker; Quigley, Boam, Waller; Partridge, Stenson, Jones, Roberts, Goodfellow. Substitute: McKenzie.

Referee: I. P. Jones, Treharris.

header by Tees, but to the boos of the crowd the referee disallowed it on the grounds of offside.

Now the Town really had the bit between their teeth, and, of course, they needed to after seeing their lead disappear twice.

On two occasions, Brown came out decisively to save well.

SUBSTITUTION

In the 67th minute, Mansfield brought on their substitute, McKenzie, for Pate, which seemed a strange sort of move in that McKenzie is an inside forward. And, indeed, he took over a striking role with Roberts dropping back into defence.

Apparently, Pate was still suffering the effects of an injury received in the first half.

A loudspeaker announcement to the effect that Chelsea were beating Watford 5-1 cheered the Town fans no end.

But at the same time they could not afford to be too complacent because Mansfield were now obviously determined to hang on to equality if they possibly could, and were filling their penalty area with some expertise.

A bad foul by Boam on MacDonald brought the Town a free kick half way in the Mansfield half.

Harrison placed it well into the goalmouth where Brown snatched the ball away from the head of Tees.

With the game now enter-

How the goals came

RYAN for Luton after 23 minutes

ROBERTS for Mansfield after 51 minutes

HARRISON for Luton after 53 minutes

PARTRIDGE for Mansfield after 57 minutes

ing its final quarter of an hour, were looking a bit desperate for the Town, who could ill afford to drop the point.

Desperately now, the Town were piling on the pressure with things still not running kindly for them in front of goal.

Slough and even Keen were now up in close support against a massed Mansfield defence.

FOULED

Then Collins got the ball into the net, but only by dint of fouling Brown in the process.

With ten minutes left, the Town made their last desperate throw, bringing on Allen for Tees and

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