

GAME THAT CLINCHED IT FOR THE TOWN

MANSFIELD 0, LUTON 0

THIS was not exactly the most sparkling way for the Town to clinch promotion, but at Mansfield on Monday, the end certainly justified the means, comments **ERIC PUGH**.

The point gained put an end to any need for further mathematical calculations, based on Fulham's chances, and certainly their hundreds of loyal fans among the crowd of 10,301, were happy with the way things went.

Throughout the season, careful planning has produced a set of tactics to meet most occasions. Not all have succeeded, of course, but no-one in his right mind could have expected an open attacking game from the Town on this occasion.

In point of fact, manager Stock plumped for the plan he used at Fulham, of putting Slough in a number seven shirt, and using him as a sweeper at the back.

At the outset, Slough did not seem so happy with the role as on the previous occasion, but he settled down to play an invaluable part in close collaboration with the indomitable Branston.

Atrocious finishing

It followed that Mansfield had much more of the play, but they showed few ideas about penetrating the Town's defence-in-depth, and when they did, their finishing was atrocious.

But, despite their limited resources up front, the Town had the best chances to win the game. One in each half fell to MacDonald, that tireless worker, who never stopped trying, despite the lack of support from which he suffered.

Usually this was forthcoming only from the hard running Busby, with a rather more limited contribution from French.

When each opportunity came, greater confidence in his right foot might have made certain of a goal for MacDonald.

The first was after 12 minutes when Brown was able to dive to save, and the other five minutes from the end, when, left with a clear run at an angle from the right, he missed the far post.

These lapses, if so they might be called, did not detract from the value of his display, and certainly Mansfield's defence could never afford to be complacent with him around.

French's great effort

Best effort of a grimly-fought, somewhat unimaginative match, came from French after 18 minutes. Picking up a pass, he left two defenders stranded before cutting in to make a glorious left-footed drive.

Had it hit the inside of the far post, it must have been a goal, but his luck was out, the ball clipped the outside of the woodwork, and went to safety.

Apart from the tensions that existed, there was the fact that conditions were not easy, because of a strong perverse wind.

Perverse, because it was behind Mansfield for most of the first half, and then shortly before half-time changed direction, so that the Town faced it for most of the match.

Considering the amount of pressure Mansfield exerted, Read was in remarkably little trouble, which was a tribute to the way in which the defence as a whole covered.

Seldom were Mansfield allowed to get a clear sight at the target before someone came in to tackle.

In fact the system, with the hard-working Allen back in his midfield role, worked well.

Maybe it was not entertaining for the majority of the crowd, unconcerned about the Town's burning ambition to take a further step on the way to the recovery of their prestige.

Time for realities

But, from the Luton point of view, this was no time for the niceties of the game, but for the realities.

They set out to do a specific job, accomplished it with efficiency, and, judging by the welcome they received when they left the field, the fans had no complaints.

Luton United's first ever record of a British best at 17.4 seconds, which was held by P. Kendrick, of Small Heath Harriers. This beat the previous record by 11 seconds, which was held by P. Kendrick, of Small Heath Harriers. Also on Saturday, at Watlington, there was a good run by Luton's other three youths, Adrian Baskerville, Graham Thomas, and Laurie Shaw, who came third in a