MAD MOMENT SEES LUTON LOSE POINT

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LUTON threw away the second point at Charlton on Saturday with a piece of midfield negligence. Had they come away with both it would have been more than they deserved from a match of flighty football that lacked depth and calibre.

By ROGER DUCKWORTH

It was a match that caught its breath early on and never got its second wind.

From Luton's point of view it was their third below-par performance in a spell of uneasy form which has reaped them an astonishing five points out of six.

Things, they say, whether good or bad, happen in threes. Luton have a week to get over their jitters. They have time to close their eyes in relief and compose themselves for the visit of Sunderland on Saturday.

The Wearsiders current form is not in the same class as either their reputation or tradition, and on Saturday they were beaten at Roker Park by Oxford United.

Crumbled

But speculation does not get me over the problem of having to try to turn last Saturday's affair into interesting reading.

When Don Givens cracked home his sixth minute goal from Keen's pass, it began to look decidedly promising for the Town. But the promise crumbled as the clock ate into the match.

Even Givens, Luton's brightest performer on the day, finished with a long face. He tore the ligaments in his right ankle and has had to cry off from Wednesday's international in Sweden, for which he had been chosen to play for Eire.

Luton angered their travelling fans by reverting to a form of 4-4-2 from 4-3-3 after their goal. This meant that Macdonald and Givens switched about while taking on the responsibility up front, and Jimmy Ryan, who was willing enough, was somewhat wasted in a half-cock position.

Macdonald had little change out of the burly Went, but he might have scored when the centre-half made an incredible back pass to Wright.

But the bewhiskered goalie dived bravely at Mac's feet to spoil his chance.

Givens never stopped trying, and after breaking in the second half he took his time over a long shot which Wright blocked. Cool-headed Givens had another go with the same result.

Chances had fallen to Charlton's Plumb in each half, but on the whole Nicholl and Moore were too tall and too quick for the midget Charlton attack.

And John Ryan and Alan Slough were solid defenders. Four minutes from time it was poor Slough who perpetrated that ghastly back pass from about 40 yards which led to Charlton's equaliser.

But how much do we blame Slough? There was a deal of slovenly play in the middle of the field and Slough did what he thought best after being left in a compromising position.

Admittedly it lacked pace, but should Read have been quicker off his line? Plumb got to it first and had two shots blocked as the Luton defence was reduced to a shambles.

With everyone lashing out desperately, it was little Ray Treacy who eventually got a foot to it and blasted the ball between the bewildered Luton backs into the net.

It was no more than Charlton deserved. They had made Luton look far from First Division candidates in a match which was played with feet rather than brains.

Luton were unsure in midfield where Court can play better than this, and though he fights hard, Hoy was exposed at times.

In goal Read was so sure of himself at times, that it was hard to understand his moments of folly when he tended to be caught way out of his goal as Charlton plastered it with shots.

Keen had an adequate match, but Luton needed a general to settle the side in midfield.

Luton should have had a penalty in each half. In the first Went and Reeves contrived to send Macdonald sprawling in the box. Result — an indirect free-kick.

In the second Went handled in the area. Result — a free-kick outside it.

Even Charlton manager Theo Foley thought Luton should have had a penalty the second time.

MATCH DETAILS

Luton Town: Read; John Ryan, Slough, Hoy, Nicholl, Moore; Jimmy Ryan, Court, Macdonald, Keen Givens (Busby).

Charlton: Wright; Curtis, Bruck; Moore, Went, Reeves; Ellis (Kinsey), Treacy, Plumb, Davies, Peacock.

Referee: Mr E. Jolly (Lancs).

Attendance — 12,928.

Goals: Givens (Luton, 6min) Treacey (Charlton, 86min).

Luton's Macdonald and Charlton keeper, Charlie Wrig