

That 4-2-4 not a big success

LUTON TOWN 2, PORTSMOUTH 1

70/71
THAT tactical move made by the Town, calculated to produce more fire power up front did not prove quite so successful as was hoped against Portsmouth at Kenilworth Road, on Saturday.

Indeed, manager Alec Stock admitted afterwards, about the 4-2-4 formation, "I did not think it was anything sensational, and we shall have thoughts about it. We have played better this season and been beaten."

Certainly this was not the Town at their fluent best, but the important thing was that victory was achieved, and it is the acquisition of points that might have been lost that turns a team into a real promotion force.

In my view, two main factors contributed to the Town's somewhat disappointing showing. Firstly, there was the fact that, although the pitch looked in splendid condition, and was certainly a tribute to groundsman Eddie Hartley, it was "dead" in places and the ball often did not move freely.

Secondly, there were the spoiling tactics employed by Portsmouth's rugged defence, one or two members of which, I thought, were fortunate to escape a booking.

Bang !

Never was there the slightest hesitation to bring down a Luton forward when danger threatened and, as Stock said afterwards, "As soon as we set up something, it was just banged down."

Definitely I thought the referee erred on the lenient side. There should have been a penalty when MacDonald was up-ended by Hand almost on the penalty spot during the second half.

There was also a positive claim before the interval when Blant chopped down the luckless MacDonald, but the referee waved for play to proceed.

In the event, the centre-forward spent a frustrating afternoon, chasing every-

thing, but finding clear-cut openings difficult to come by.

Yet, he had a hand, or rather a foot, in the winning goal, though he does not receive credit for it in the records.

Five minutes after half-time, GIVENS, picking up a through pass, shot from about 25 yards. At the time it was perfectly clear that the ball had been deflected quite considerably by someone, but the consensus of opinion was that it was a Portsmouth player, and Givens received the official credit for the goal.

No chance

Afterwards, it turned out that the ball hit MacDonald on the boot, and Milkins who, in any case, was still looking shaky from an injury, was left helpless.

MacDonald's part was completely inadvertent, and he was not inclined to claim the goal, being quite content to leave that with Givens, and it took him into double figures.

Afterwards, the Portsmouth team chief, Ron Tindall, thought his team had been most unlucky, especially in the way the decider came, and certainly, a case could be made for that viewpoint.

From the way in which the Town started, another convincing success seemed on the cards. They were ahead in seven minutes, when Keen tapped a free kick sideways to JOHN RYAN, who opened his account for the season with a firm, left-footed drive.

Maybe, had they had time in which to build on that splendid start, the Town would not have found it such a struggle as they did. However, a minute later,

they saw their lead disappear, when McCANN eluded two despairing tackles and beat the diving Read from around 15 yards.

Injuries

After that, dourness took over to a large extent, and there were some injuries to cope with.

Nicholl played for much of the time with blood streaming from his nose. At one time there was some suspicion that it was broken, but happily this proved to be unfounded.

In the 36th minute Ley went off with a gash over the eye that needed three stitches. That came in a collision with Jimmy Ryan, who played on for a time with mild concussion. Another who played under a handicap was Hoy, who ricked his back early on, and the casualty list was completed by Moore.

The Town left-half passed a fitness test only just before the start and, as a precaution, manager Stock switched to Bannister as his substitute in place of Court, who had been nominated.

Moore hurt

That proved a fortunate circumstance because in the first minutes, Moore received a kick on the same part of the leg to which he had been having treatment all week.

He struggled on, patently below his best, until half-time, when Bannister came on to complete the back four and, although he looked a bit short of big match practice, he did well enough.

Even taking into account his injury, Hoy did not have a happy match, so that Keen

was much the more successful in midfield.

Slough and Nicholl were the best of the defence, with Read becoming a minor hero by some fine saves in the last 10 minutes, when Portsmouth threatened to snatch a point.

On this occasion, Busby was probably too keen to impress because, with the visiting defence packing their penalty area, he was needed more on the wing than he was to be found, and he tended, too, to run with the ball.

LUTON TOWN: Read; Ryan (John), Slough; Hoy, Nicholl, Moore (Bannister); Ryan (Jimmy), Givens, MacDonald, Keen, Busby.

PORTSMOUTH: Milkins; Hand, Ley (Travers); Piper, Blant, Munks; McCann, Trebilcock, Hiron, Bromley, Jennings.

Referee: J. E. Thacker, Scarborough.

Attendance: 16,876.