

I DIDN'T GO WILD AT THAT - STOCK

LUTON TOWN 2 PORTSMOUTH 1

LUTON TOWN's victory over Portsmouth was as empty as the shops after Christmas. But as manager Alec Stock said afterwards: "Football is a game of winning. We have played better and lost points — like against Carlisle last week. I didn't go wild about this performance. It was far from sensational and we shall have to do something about it."

And like the rest of the 17,000 onlookers, Mr Stock was baffled by some of the decisions made by Scarborough referee John Thacker.

"I find it very difficult to understand referees," moaned Mr Stock. "I try not to say anything but it's very difficult."

Mr Thacker, a GPO mechanic, certainly got his lines crossed on Saturday. Apart from one or two peculiar decisions, he was weak-chinned when it came to doling out discipline. Blant, Munks and Travers of Pompey could all have been booked for malpractice, and John Moore should have been booked for rugby tackling Hiron when he escaped on the edge of the penalty box.

Rugged

It was an effort that would have delighted the Fijians, but Moore himself knows it was ungentlemanly conduct — at the very least. Yet you get booked for flicking the ball away while you get into position. It doesn't make sense.

Portsmouth were as rugged as dockyard workers in defence — yet ambitious in attack. Hiron, Trebilcock and McCann all reduced Luton's teetering defence to panic stations.

Mind you, there was some excuse for Luton's dodgy defence. John Moore was not fully fit, and got whacked right on his previous week's leg injury in the first minute. From then on he was always conscious of his injury, and his tackling timing went out of the window.

By ROGER DUCKWORTH 70/71

He was told to take a bath at half-time, and Jack Bannister made a return to the first team. And what a good job he did. He has lost none of his edge in his sojourn in the reserves, and he restored some respectability to the back end of the Luton side.

Tremendous saves

Luckily goalkeeper Tony Read was in splendid form, and he made a collection of tremendous saves and interceptions as Pompey threatened to poach a point. And with the injured Moore out of the way Nicholl was able to concentrate more on his own job, and he took a firmer grip on the exploits of the skilful Hiron.

John Ryan was not so assertive as usual, but he will be better remembered for his eighth minute goal than for some misuse of the ball. He put the Town ahead by smacking a push free-kick from Keen past Milkins from the corner of the box.

Slough was perhaps the best Luton defender with Nicholl a close second. But this was the Luton rearguard's worst display of the season.

With David Court left out for experimental reasons, Roger Hoy was not at his best in midfield, and although he put in his share of effort, he too was guilty of some bad distribution.

Despite always being zealously marked by two muscle-men, Macdonald again showed admirable devotion to duty.

Givens continues to show delightful flair as a roaming, intelligent inside-forward and it was he who settled the issue soon after half-time. But what a lucky effort it was. Racing in towards the area he let go a violent low shot which Milkins looked to have covered. Then it struck the foot of Macdonald and was deflected over the

head of poor Milkins into the net.

There was some fun in the dressing room as to who should claim the goal, but Macdonald sportingly said: "I was just trying to get out of the way. It was Don's goal."

Luton's man of the match was undoubtedly Mike Keen, who commanded the proceedings from every section of the pitch.

If Jimmy Ryan did not always come up to scratch, there is a reason for that too. It was not revealed until later that he was suffering from concussion after a clash of heads with George Ley. He suffered two severe nose bleeds in the dressing room, but would not let on the extent of his injury because John Moore was in trouble.

Over-anxious

Ley had to leave to have three stitches in a cut head.

Busby was brought into the side to give the attack more life, but he became over-anxious to succeed, and often forsook the left-wing position, from where he could have done more damage, in search of action in the middle.

That is not meant as an unkind comment, and Busby did some good work. But I can't help remembering his long run in the second half when he ignored Macdonald who was in an ocean of open space in front of goal.

Portsmouth were always a brave side, especially goalkeeper Milkins who took a bit of a bashing but always came back for more. Piper, too, had a fine match.

The defence will have to tighten up for the visit to Cardiff next week. Former Luton man McCann found little trouble in equalising for the Hampshire club in the ninth minute.