

SPORT 4

BIG BOOT COSTS A POINT

LUTON TOWN 1, MILLWALL 1

FROM the way in which the Town tackled their task at Kenilworth Road, on Tuesday, to make sure of vital promotion points, one would have thought that midfield build-up, holding the ball constructively, and the accurate short pass had gone out of fashion, writes ERIC PUGH.

Instead of putting together their attacks from depth, they relied on the big kick and hard chasing, tactics that were really made to measure for an uncompromising Millwall defence.

Tension and over-eagerness, amounting to desperation at times, contributed to the mistaken tactics and, at the finish, coach Jimmy Andrews was as baffled as anyone else.

Certainly, he is no advocate of the helter-skelter style the Town adopted, and there were times when the game cried out for someone to put his foot on the ball and calm things down a bit.

Almost the only sign of midfield construction came from Keen, who brought his vast experience to bear on a difficult situation, and he, at least, tried to use the ball with forethought.

For the most part, though, the Town seemed intent on trying to belt the cover off the ball, and MacDonald and Busby had the unenviable task of chasing, mostly with forlorn hope.

Small doses best

The long ball is all very well in small doses and used with some discernment, but there was no change in the Town's pattern, and it became even more pronounced in the second half.

Then, with a one-goal advantage given them by KEEN after half-an-hour, they obviously held the initiative, because it was up to Millwall to come out at them.

Instead, they failed to settle down to a more ordered style and, afterwards, Andrews said: "We became much too desperate."

At times in the first half, there was some mid-field build-up, but it was perhaps a pointer to events that the main threat to Millwall was posed by the long throws-in of MacDonald.

Several times these caught King, a capable goalkeeper, in something approaching two minds, and he had plenty of employment during the first half, when Millwall were content with a largely unambitious role.

Things might have turned out differently had a first-minute goal scored by Jimmy Ryan not been disallowed for offside against someone else.

Keen's goal was brilliantly taken. He moved up for a corner by Jimmy Ryan, and, meeting the ball squarely with his head, sent it rocketing past the startled King.

This was one of the few shreds of evi-

dence that the Town can be deadly finishers, and the only other worthwhile attempt before the interval was from Busby, whose header went inches wide.

Having been a spectator for most of the first half, Read had to deal with almost the first direct shot to reach him—a free kick from Burnett—in the first minute after the interval, and the fact that he made a two-handed punch of a ball that was catchable, was not calculated to do much to instil confidence.

Occasionally, Millwall broke into attack, and Possee was unlucky when he missed the far post by inches with Read stranded. Despite that, and the fact that Brown made an unexpected sally to drive inches too high, there seemed to be no threat to the Town completing the victory they so sorely needed.

They badly needed another goal, however, and Busby did his best when he closed in from the left and forced King to concede a corner.

And it was that sort of award that brought disaster at the other end with just three minutes remaining. Possee made a low cross, the ball seemed to elude at least three pairs of legs, and there was BROWN, whom the Town had neglected to mark, to sweep the ball through from close in.

So, a point that the Town could not afford, was allowed to slip away after a display that was frankly disappointing.

Pre-match anxiety had been about the centre-half position from which Nicholl had to stand down because of injury, but no-one need have worried, because Slough made the move from left-back with complete success. Cool and quick, he shut out Bridges completely, and there will be no qualms about playing him there again.

Bannister's chance

This move gave Bannister a chance of recall and, despite a knee injury in the first half, he made his usual, effective, quiet contribution.

In my mind, there is no doubt that Givens's constructive ability was missed in midfield, because Hoy, who took over from him there, was one of the big-kick culprits.

Ill-used at times by heavy tackling, Jimmy Ryan worked hard, but the front-runners, MacDonald, Busby and Givens, who did a lot of wandering, spent much of the night chasing unsubstantial shadows.

LUTON TOWN: Read; John Ryan, Bannister; Hoy, Slough, Moore; Jimmy Ryan, Busby, MacDonald, Keen, Givens. Substitute: Anderson.

MILLWALL: King; Brown, Cripps; Dorney, Kitchener, Burnett; Possee, Bolland, Bridges, Dunphy, Alder. Substitute: Coxhill.



Town's Don Givens tries a header in the Tuesday evening encounter with Millwall.